

CHARLES PORTIS: A MEMOIR OF SMALL-TOWN LIFE IN THE '40s

The Atlantic Monthly

MAY 1999

THE GREAT DISRUPTION

By FRANCIS
FUKUYAMA

HUMAN NATURE AND
THE RECONSTITUTION OF
SOCIAL ORDER

MANAGING WHALING
vs. ENDING IT

HOW DYLAN CHANGED
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WAS THE GREAT WAR
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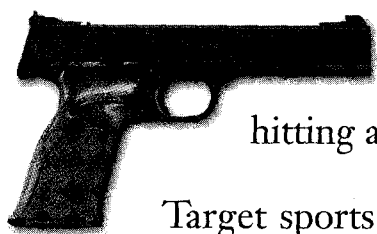
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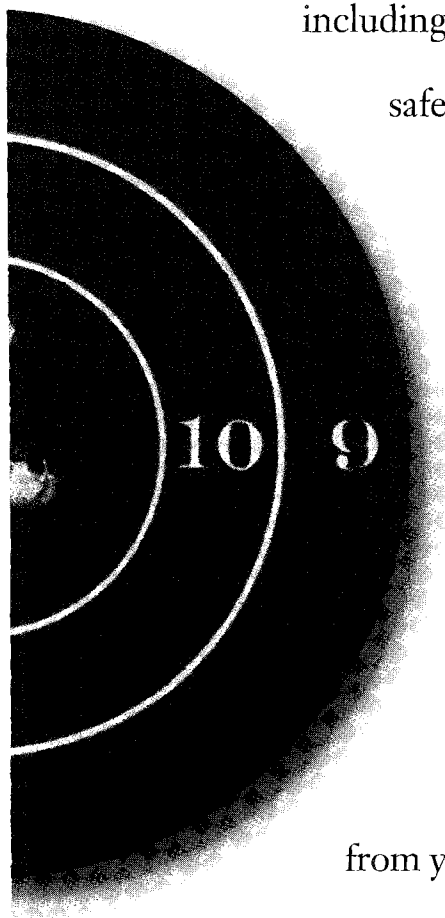
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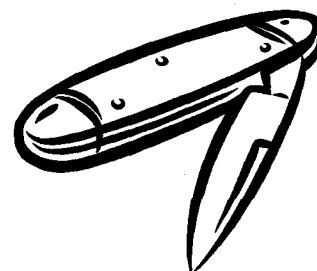




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One of America's most provocative thinkers argues that the social ills of recent decades are neither illusion nor fluke. The rise in crime, the decline in stable families, the erosion of trust in government and fellow citizens—these have constituted a Great Disruption in prevailing social values throughout the industrialized world. They have been brought on by the advent of the information age. The good news: Human beings are designed to create moral rules and social order. A Great Reconstitution may already be under way.

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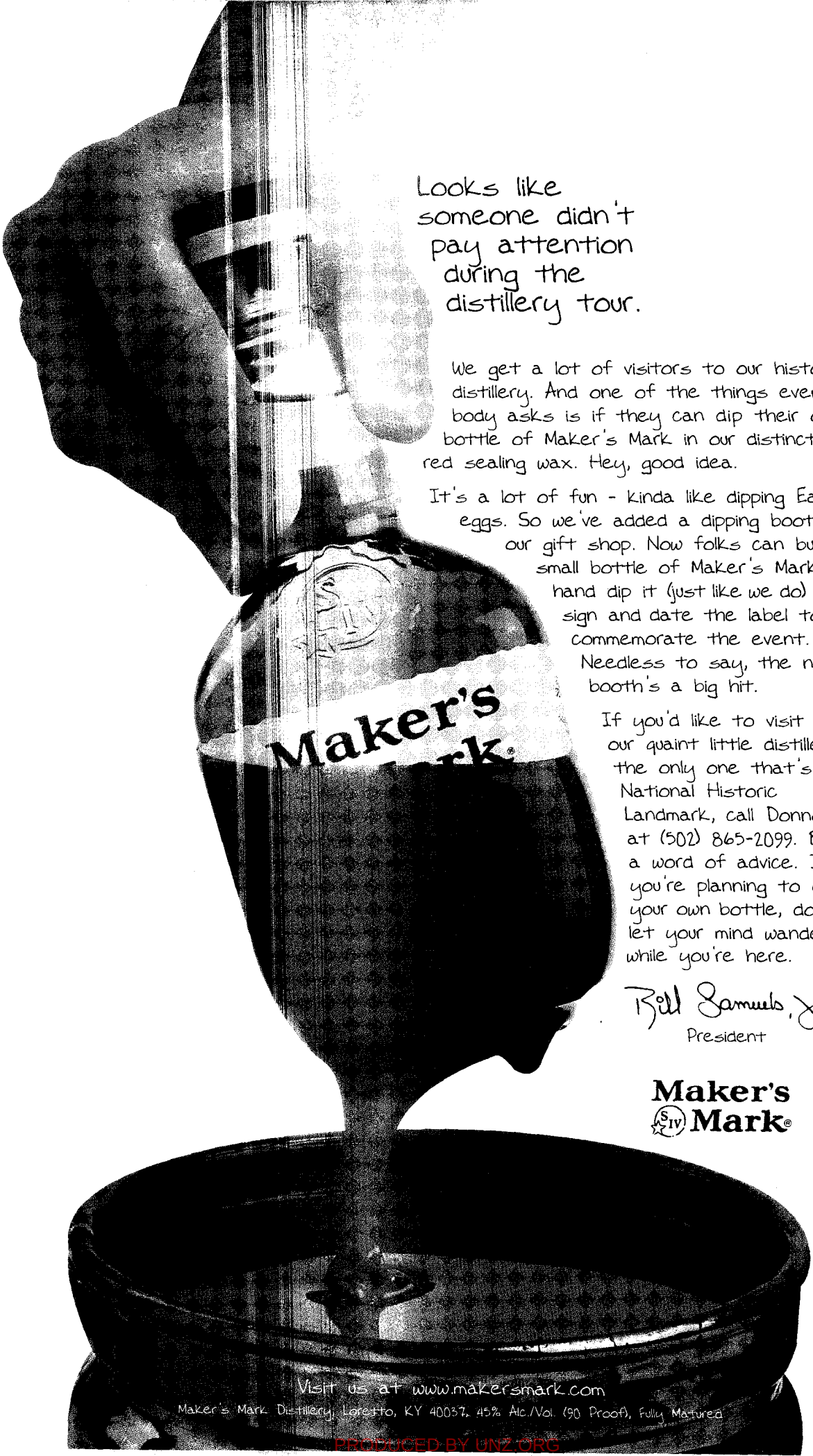
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FRANCIS Fukuyama, the author of "The Great Disruption," this month's cover story, made his public reputation with "The End of History?," an article published a decade ago in the journal *The National Interest*. Fukuyama, then thirty-six, was the deputy director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, between stints at the Rand Corporation. His article, which appeared just as the Soviet bloc was decisively crumbling, revived the Hegelian notion that there is a "direction" to history—and argued that the direction runs toward liberal democracy and capitalism. His article became the subject of considerable national debate. An expanded version of Fukuyama's argument was published as a book, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992).

Some saw Fukuyama as a propagandist for a "triumphalist" view of U.S. foreign policy and the Cold War. Fukuyama frankly celebrates what he considers to be the superiority of Western values. But as he demonstrated in his next book, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (1995), he is no unalloyed free-marketeer or apologist for capitalism. Fukuyama pointed out in that book that the workings of market forces vary widely—and produce widely varying levels of inequality

and injustice—from place to place. He argued that the social success of capitalism depends heavily on cultural factors, notably the extent to which a presumption of trust exists beyond the core family unit. In his new book, *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order*, Fukuyama probes the connections between economics and culture even more deeply.

Fukuyama himself would make for an intriguing study of the impact of cultural factors on personal outcomes. He grew up on the Lower East Side of Manhattan; his father was a sociologist and a Congregationalist minister. Fukuyama's academic career took him to Cornell, Yale, and Harvard; along the way his interests evolved from philosophy and the classics to comparative literature to international affairs.

Describing the trajectory of his career, Fukuyama makes reference to his father's work: "The kind of moral and social issues I am writing about in *The Great Disruption* were always very important to him. I'm coming back to the set of issues that I grew up with. The biggest problems we face are in our moral and social life. Everything else is going pretty well." —THE EDITORS



LAURA HOLMGREN

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Francis Davis ("Napoleon in Rags") is a contributing editor of *The Atlantic*. He recently received an ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for "The Man From Heaven," which appeared in the June, 1997, *Atlantic*.

Francis Fukuyama ("The Great Disruption") is the Hirst Professor of Public Policy and the director of the International

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Erica Funkhouser ("Woodcock") teaches a poetry-writing workshop at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She is the author of *Sure Shot and Other Poems* (1992) and *The Actual World* (1997).

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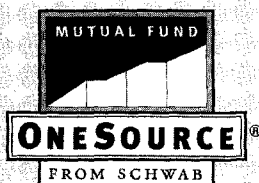
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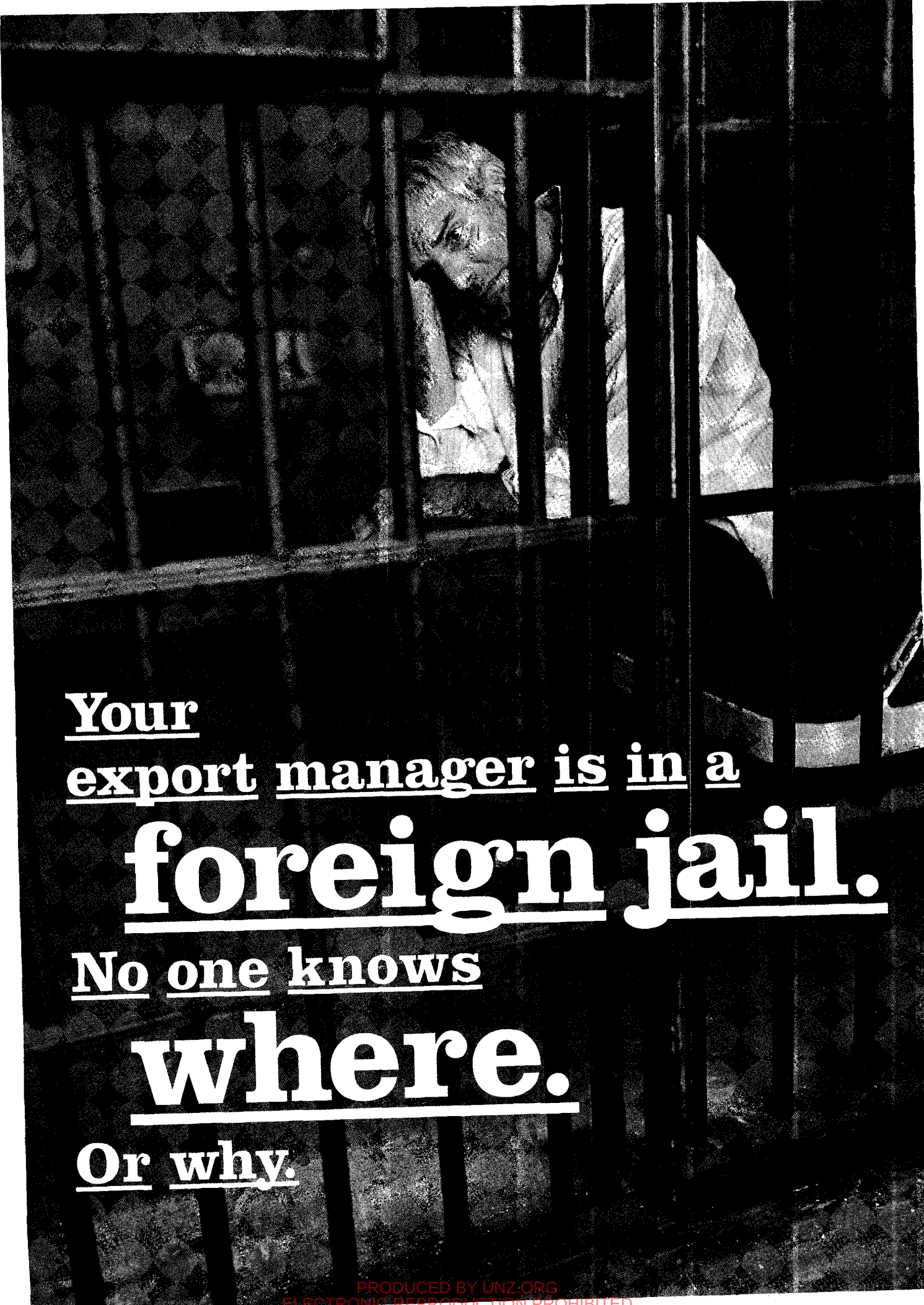
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LETTERS

The New Germ Theory

Judith Hooper's article "A New Germ Theory" (February *Atlantic*) sheds speculative light on one of modern medicine's great failings—its disregard for evolutionary theory as an organizing principle for wellness and disease. Paul Ewald and Gregory Cochran are certainly correct that fitness costs should be factored into all theories of etiology. What is apparently missing from their simplistic analysis is an understanding of adaptation. The environment in which we live now is very different from the one for which we are evolutionarily adapted, and coping with this environment produces great stresses on organ systems. If a child grows up confined to a four-foot-high box and as an adult walks with a stoop, it is not necessary to posit an infectious pathogen to explain the posture. A more troubling aspect of Ewald's fitness blitzkrieg is the idea that homosexuality is a result of an infectious agent acting during development. Apparently ignored here are the contributions to evolutionary biology of W. D. Hamilton, E. O. Wilson, and R. L. Trivers, which provide a much better basis for understanding homosexuality, as a phenomenon of inclusive fitness.

James T. Martin

College of Osteopathic Medicine of the
Pacific Western University
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Pomona, Calif.

Re Paul Ewald's "new germ theory": how could the postulated population of microbes, notably chlamydia, be so superabundant as to cause heart disease, cancer, diabetes, schizophrenia, and other chronic diseases in such large numbers of people? Underlying this conjectured scenario is an inexplicably universal state of severely diminished immune competence.

The new germ theory also falters in its attempted application to emotionally determined illnesses, including anxiety di-

arrhea, ulcerative colitis due to severe repression of guilt, and cachexia resulting from prolonged depression.

The new germ theory further fails to account for the staggering array of in-born metabolic errors, which are the consequences of genetically linked enzyme deficiencies. Specific examples: metachromatic leukodystrophy, a brain disease involving lipid accumulation due to a missing sulfatase enzyme; porphyria, the derangement of heme metabolism that precipitated the insanity of King George III; and the Lesch-Nyhan syndrome, in which mental retardation, chorea and athetosis (movement disorders), and self-mutilating behavior result from the lack of a transferase enzyme. Gene therapy, not antibiotics or other anti-infective drugs, and not vaccines, offers promise for correcting or preventing these disorders in the distant future.

Vincent W. Franco
Arlington, Va.

The impetus behind Paul Ewald's work is the realization that many common diseases thought to have a genetic basis should have been weeded out of the genome long ago, based on their cost to the individual carrier's reproductive success. Ewald raises such examples as schizophrenia, atherosclerosis, ulcers, Alzheimer's, and cancer, and infers that infectious agents, with their own evolutionary agenda, must be invoked to fully explain the prevalence of these afflictions.

This conclusion flows from the presumption, which has been fashionable for a generation, that natural selection takes place on an individual level, and almost never group against group. When evolution is regarded as an individual process, it follows that any gene that negatively impacts fertility should disappear quickly from the genome.

But suppose that the fitness of the community is a controlling factor. Cancer and heart disease tend to attack the aged with a vengeance and spare the



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young. If weakening with age is a group-level adaptation that assures turnover and diversity in an evolving population, then susceptibility to geriatric diseases may be an indirect result of group selection.

How viable is the proposition that group selection looms so large on the evolutionary landscape? Although many evolutionary theorists hold group selection in contempt, the judgment of those who have studied the question most closely is mixed. A growing body of theory and fieldwork supports the viability of group selection. And great phenomena of nature remain mysterious to those who cleave to the exclusively individual view: the prevalence of sexual reproduction; the breadth of genetic diversity within and among species; the ordering and chromosomal structure of the genome, which appears to be highly optimized for the efficiency of adaptive variation. These phenomena all have plausible, straightforward explanations in terms of group selection, whereas individual selection theory strains to encompass them.

Joshua Mitteldorf

*University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pa.*

To a physician long interested in microbiology, "A New Germ Theory" brought up the interesting question of scientific information and timing. What causes information to be set aside and what determines when its time has finally come?

In 1946 I was a first-year resident at the New York Hospital when the senior attending physician, Constance Guion, called to tell me that she was admitting a patient who was suffering with an acute, painful peptic stomach ulcer.

Dr. Guion instructed me to start the patient on "that new antibiotic, aureomycin," the forerunner of the modern tetracycline family of antibiotics. "But Dr. Guion," I expostulated. "I thought you said she had an ulcer. Why would you want to treat her with an antibiotic?"

Dr. Guion replied, "The latest research over at Mount Sinai shows that 'peptic' ulcers are actually caused by germs; now do as I say and give her the aureomycin."

The patient went home three days later free of symptoms.

Paul Fremont-Smith

*Physician in Chief, Emeritus
New England Baptist Hospital
Boston, Mass.*

Paul Ewald argues that homosexuality takes a "fitness hit" because it is nonreproductive and runs afoul of natural selection. But sociobiology has suggested a conflicting theory—that homosexuality is a plus factor, because child-bearers with gay family members have the extra help of these generally (but not always!) nonparents to aid them in their child-rearing. Furthermore, Gregory Cochran's comment about grandmothers not being "hampered" by babies suggests that being reproductive takes a fitness hit of its own.

Carl L. Jech

*DeAnza College
Cupertino, Calif.*

Judith Hooper replies:

James Martin and Carl Jech both refer to "inclusive fitness" theories in evolutionary biology to account for the continued prevalence of homosexuality despite its obvious fitness costs. In particular, a theory known popularly as the "good uncle" theory—elaborated by E. O. Wilson—holds that gay men may indirectly perpetuate their genes by helping to raise their (genetically similar) nephews and nieces. Although this may be an appealing theory, it is inadequate to explain the facts. To counteract a whopping fitness cost of around 80 percent, gay men would have to be very, very good uncles indeed—especially given that they share with nephews and nieces only 25 percent of their genes. Simple calculations show us that in order to compensate for not reproducing, a gay uncle's investment in a sibling's children would have to be twice as strong as a parent's. If this were the case, it could not have escaped our attention. But there is no evidence that gay uncles are any more devoted than other uncles. (Mr. Martin inaccurately suggests that Paul Ewald has ignored the work of Hamilton and Trivers; both scientists have been major influences on Ewald's theories.)

As for group-selection theories, cited by Joshua Mitteldorf: If the benefits of altruistic behavior were to the community as a whole, rather than concentrated in close relatives, the genes responsible for altruism would not prevail. The selection on which his arguments are based must be extremely weak relative to selection acting at the level of the individual or close relatives.

Regarding Vincent Franco's observa-

tions: There are plenty of germs around, and reduced immunity is not required for infection. A number of organisms infect nearly everyone—Epstein-Barr, for example—and many infectious organisms do not induce curative immunity, such as *Helicobacter pylori*, the herpes viruses, and HIV. Lesch-Nyhan syndrome and other inborn metabolic disorders certainly exist, but they are rare, typically afflicting one person in 50,000. They are not the main cause of disease.

Paul Fremont-Smith's letter is fascinating. One wonders what Constance Guion knew and how she knew it—and who dropped the ball.

What Is Intelligence?

In his analysis of conceptions of intelligence ("Who Owns Intelligence?," February *Atlantic*) Howard Gardner makes an effective case—against his own theory. He argues that "emotional intelligence" is a misnomer for the degree to which people are sensitive to emotions in themselves and others, and that this is better termed "emotional sensitivity." I couldn't agree more—but where does that leave Gardner's "interpersonal" and "intrapersonal" intelligences? It makes more sense to view these as personality traits, like emotional sensitivity, than to view them as aspects of intelligence.

I enjoy watching Barry Sanders play football and Tara Lipinski skate, but what they display is better understood as athletic ability than as "bodily-kinesthetic intelligence," as Gardner would have it. Stuffing into "intelligence" the wide range of athletic, musical, and other abilities and traits that Gardner proposes to include only serves to stretch the "elastic band" of the term to the point where it is flaccid and incoherent. My prediction would be that the twenty-first century will see the endurance of "general intelligence" and the passing away of Gardner's theory into the history of ideas that didn't quite work.

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett
University of Maryland
College Park, Md.

I think that Howard Gardner's claims about the breadth of intelligence are plausible, but he misconstrues the position of the supporters of the "g" factor, or general intelligence, on this issue. They

can go along with Gardner's claim that intelligence is actually a broader thing than what we have traditionally thought about and measured. Their claim is not, as Gardner implies, that there is only one intellectual faculty but that however many dimensions of intelligence there are, one's intelligence along each dimension correlates with one's scores along all the other dimensions. This correlation is the evidence for a "g" factor. Thus their claim about the existence of a "g" factor is consistent with Gardner's claim that intelligence is a broader thing than we have traditionally thought.

Greg Feirman
San Diego, Calif.

Howard Gardner replies:

Jeffrey Arnett raises questions about the extension of the term "intelligence." Clearly, others have used the term "talent" where I speak of "intelligences." I have no objection to speaking of seven or eight talents. I do object to honoring some capacities, such as skill with numbers or words, as "intelligence" while demoting others, such as skill with music or spatial information, to mere "talent." Understanding oneself or others is not a personality trait: it represents a capacity to compute information about the realm of human beings.

Greg Feirman attributes to most psychometricians a more moderate position than they actually hold. My misgiving about the statistical "g" is that it emerges when one administers a battery of short-answer tests. Perhaps a certain speed or flexibility at responding to diverse items is being tested. I prefer to assess individuals in "intelligence-fair" ways—for example, assessing interpersonal intelligence by observing individuals as they interact in situations. We simply do not know whether "g" would disappear if each intelligence were assessed by means of an appropriate non-short-answer test.

China and Tibet

Peter Hessler's article "Tibet Through Chinese Eyes" (February *Atlantic*) deeply upset me. Hessler approvingly portrays idealistic young Chinese who settle in Tibet to help "the indigenous population." Does he include those Chinese who have been responsible for the genocide of 1.2

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million Tibetans since the 1950s? With such friends who needs enemies?

Hessler is wrong about facts large and small. He claims that prior to the Chinese invasion of 1951 "there were no public schools in Tibet, whereas now there are more than 4,000." He fails to note that Buddhist monasteries functioned as schools for the general population—until the Chinese destroyed more than 6,000 monasteries. Hessler quotes an unnamed foreign observer as saying that the population is 2.5 million, whereas in fact it is above six million. Hessler also makes a point that China spends a lot of money in Tibet, but the country was self-supporting before the Chinese invasion. China's Stalinist development policy in Tibet has cost a lot of money, but the benefits for Tibetans have been slight. Does Hessler include the costs of the huge military internal-security presence in Tibet as something helpful to the population?

Howard Park
Washington, D.C.

"Tibet Through Chinese Eyes" is factually accurate and valuable. However, Peter Hessler uncritically repeats the Chinese propaganda that Tibet has two million people. It actually has six million—China partitioned Tibet in 1959 and publicly refers to only the Tibetan Autonomous [sic] Region as "Tibet." So when China and Tibetans speak of Tibet they are not referring to the same entity.

Although the article gives human faces to the Chinese civilians who, through economic incentives, are being moved into Tibet, it has a major weakness. Hessler fails to describe the positive value of Tibetan civilization—what it offers to the world. He thereby fails to indicate the depth of the tragedy of China's obliteration of Tibet. And although a people's right to self-determination is sufficient justification for support of Tibetan freedom, without some cultural understanding the article remains incomplete. Consequently, Hessler appears to equivocate. He seems to say, "Yes, China is imperialist; yes, China has committed horrible crimes in Tibet; but, in fairness, China is spending money and investing!" Would he be equivocal about Nazi activities in Vichy France if they had been good for the economy? Or if the United States conquered Mexico (based on some dusty claim stemming from the Republic of

Texas) and thereby improved living standards? Is investing money progress?

Frank J. Howard
Amitabha Foundation
Rochester, N.Y.

Peter Hessler replies:

Although I agree that it is valuable for Americans to study Tibetan culture, there is some risk in viewing this as a "resource"; no society should be placed under glass for the enjoyment of others. My conversations with ordinary Tibetans indicated that although they are certainly upset by the enormous damage that has been inflicted on their culture, they also have no desire to return to the brutal conditions of pre-1951 Tibet, in which 95 percent of the population was illiterate and the average life expectancy was thirty-six years. Americans who take for granted electricity, education, and medical care should avoid making blanket dismissals of Chinese progress in Tibet, and we need to accept that Tibetans, like people everywhere, welcome modernization—even some of the modernization that comes from China.

Whites and Jazz

In his review of Richard M. Sudhalter's *Lost Chords* ("Black and White Intertwined," February *Atlantic*), William H. Youngren writes, "The skewed logic of record executives [in the 1920s] dictated that black audiences would accept only jazz whereas white audiences wanted polite dance music." This generalization may be largely true as regards black audiences, but it is wrong regarding white audiences.

Record executives realized they could sell plenty of hot numbers by black bands to white record-buyers. In the late twenties Victor, the world's leading record producer, issued a series of "hot dance" records featuring some of the great black orchestras—those of Duke Ellington, Jelly Roll Morton, Benny Moten, Earl Hines, and King Oliver—along with some recordings by white jazzmen such as Eddie Condon and Jack Teagarden. These hot-dance discs were aimed at a broad market, *not* just black record-buyers. Other record companies also directed some of their recordings by black bands at a white audience and, like Victor, did

not confine their black artists to "race" labels that sold only in African-American neighborhoods.

Paradoxically, the record companies also knew they could sell ordinary dance tunes played by black bands to white audiences. Thus it was not only white bands with jazz credentials that were "forced to record wretched pop tunes." Black bands, too, recorded their share of pop tunes. In the mid-twenties, when the incomparable Louis Armstrong played with Fletcher Henderson, this group recorded, along with classic jazz standards such as "Copenhagen" and "Sugar Foot Stomp," dozens of popular songs, such as "Swanee Butterfly" and "I'll See You in My Dreams," aimed at the same white audience that danced to its music at the Roseland, in midtown Manhattan.

Eugene Kramer
Rochester, N.Y.

William H. Youngren replies:

Eugene Kramer has caught me in a reckless overstatement, which I welcome the chance to correct. I should not have said that 1920s record executives thought "black audiences would accept only jazz whereas white audiences wanted polite dance music." Sudhalter, on pages 303-304 of *Lost Chords*, refers more moderately to the record executives' assumption "that 'hot' jazz, in common with the blues, was best received by black record buyers, . . . and that whites, by contrast, preferred their 'jazz' on the polite side."

What led me to overstate was, I think, Sudhalter's later assertion that records by black bands were "most often . . . not even distributed in communities where whites lived; white fans (or musicians) looking for new releases by Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, or Bessie Smith had to go to black neighborhoods to find them."

(I would, incidentally, remind Mr. Kramer that on each of the three separate masters of the Henderson "I'll See You in My Dreams" is a smashing solo by "the incomparable Louis Armstrong.")

Editors' Note

A reader has pointed out to us that the photograph labeled "Isoroku Yamamoto" on page 53 of the March *Atlantic* is misidentified. The photograph came to us labeled "Admiral Yamamoto." It is actually a photograph of Admiral Yeiisuke Yamamoto.

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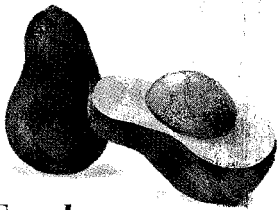
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Food

May 5: Some 28 million avocados, mostly in the form of guacamole, will be eaten in the United States today—more than on any other day of the year. The reason: today is Cinco de Mayo, which commemorates a Mexican victory over the armies of Napoleon III. The biggest celebrations will be in places like California, Texas, and Chicago, where Mexican-American culture mixes with American culture and where the day is seen as an occasion for a party even by many who have no Mexican roots. An irony that celebrants may be unaware of: none of the avocados eaten here today will come from Mexico. In 1914 the U.S. Department of Agriculture banned Mexican avocados because of a seed weevil known to infest Mexican groves. In 1997 the USDA agreed to allow avocados from Michoacan into 19 northeastern states from November to February, on the rationale that the cold should kill any accompanying pests, and that if any did survive, they would not pose a threat to the crops grown in those states.

Environment

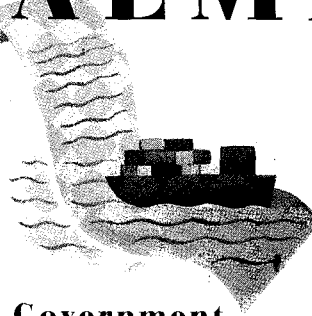
Northeasterners may notice clearer skies this spring and summer, because the first phase of a program designed to reduce emissions of nitrogen oxide—a pollutant that reacts with hydrocarbons and strong sunlight to produce ground-level ozone, the main component of smog—takes effect this month. The Nitrogen Oxide Budget Program will issue a fixed

number of “emissions allowances” to the states in the region. Each state can decide how to distribute its allowances among producers, such as coal-fired electric utilities and industrial plants; the allowances can be used, traded, or sold. Many states are choosing to reward already-efficient plants by awarding allowances based on good performance. The program was developed in 1995 through the collaboration of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Ozone Transport Commission, and industry and environmental groups. It aims to reduce NOx emissions in the Northeast by more than 75 percent by 2003.



Arts & Letters

Those seeking respite from Star Wars mania—the long-awaited prequel to the space trilogy has its premiere this month—might consider visiting the Library of Congress, where the first posthumous retrospective of the work of the American designers Charles and Ray Eames will open on May 20. A husband-and-wife team, the Eameses were best known for elegant but economical furniture, especially form-fitting plywood and plastic chairs. They were leaders in the postwar movement to couple basic human needs—for example, shelter—with comfort, beauty, and affordability. They also designed buildings, toys, books, and corporate projects (IBM’s pavilion for the 1964 World’s Fair, for example), and they helped the U.S. Information Service to produce films intended to influence America’s image abroad. The exhibit will include more than 500 items. It will close in Washington in September and travel to museums in New York, St. Louis, Los Angeles, and Seattle, and abroad.



Government

May 1: The ocean-shipping industry becomes partly deregulated today, as last year’s Ocean Shipping Reform Act takes effect. The legislation, which is intended to give importers and exporters more choice and flexibility, permits many aspects of contracts between carriers and their clients to remain confidential: such details as rates, terms of service, and damages no longer need be made public. The act brings the ocean-shipping industry in line with truck, rail, and air shipping, which were deregulated in the early 1980s. It took Congress four years to pass the bill; opponents included small shipping firms, which fear that carriers may begin secretly giving volume discounts to large shippers and force smaller companies out of business.

Demographics

May 30: Judging from past trends, fewer long-distance calls will be placed today—the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend—than on any other day of the year. On the corresponding Sunday of last year, for example, AT&T handled only 93 million calls—some 15 million fewer than on a typical Sunday. The reason for the dip is thought to be the fact that on this holiday weekend, the unofficial start of summer, people spend time outside and away from their home phones. (Although mobile-phone use has proliferated, most calls made from mobile phones are local ones.) Sunday is in gen-

eral the slowest day of the week for long-distance calling, much of which consists of business calls (many businesses are open for at least part of the day on Saturdays). Long-distance use will have its second lowest day on the Sunday of Labor Day weekend.

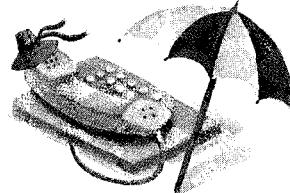
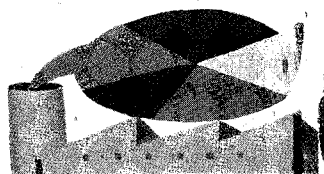
The Skies

Venus, which shines brilliantly in the western evening sky all month, reaches its greatest sunset altitude above the horizon for the year around May 11. 15: New Moon, which, combined with the fact that the Moon is at its monthly perigee (the position in its orbit closest to Earth), should generate the most extreme high and low tides of the year. 17: The slim crescent Moon lies below Venus, which in turn lies below the bright twin stars Castor and Pollux. 30: Full Moon, also known this month as the Milk or Planting Moon.



25 Years Ago

Octavio Paz, writing in the May, 1974, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: “Technology... has impoverished the world... [and] become the most powerful agent of historical entropy... It imposes uniformity without furthering unity. It levels the differences between distinctive national cultures and styles, but it fails to eradicate the rivalries and hatreds between peoples and states. After turning rivals into identical twins, it purveys the very same weapons to both... the danger of technology lies not only in the death-dealing power of many of its inventions but in the fact that it constitutes a grave threat to the very essence of the historical process. By doing away with the diversity of societies and cultures, it does away with history itself.”



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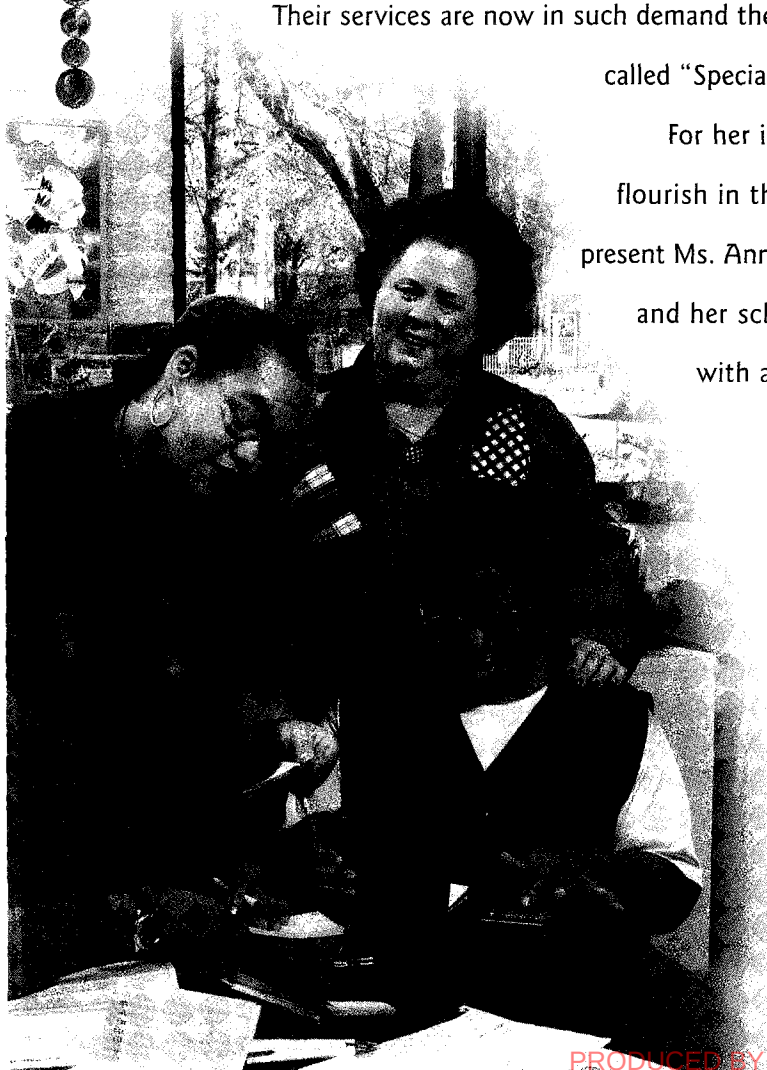
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Flouting the Convention

The ongoing campaign to ban all commercial whaling is driven by politics rather than science, and is setting a terrible precedent

THIS month the International Whaling Commission will hold its fifty-first annual meeting, in Grenada. Once again pro- and anti-whaling forces will barrage the commission and each other with press releases, angry denunciations, and publicity stunts. Once again politics will drown out science and will push the commission into a state of posturing irrelevancy. And once again the result will be a disservice to the people who whale, to the commission itself, and, most troubling, to international environmental law and sound resource management. Indeed, the continuing dysfunction of the IWC—one of the most prominent conservation groups in the world—should worry everybody who has concerns about preserving our natural heritage.

In 1946 a fifteen-year effort by whaling nations to exert multilateral control over the whaling industry finally produced the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, the fundamental purpose of which was “to provide for the proper conservation of whale stocks and thus make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry.” The convention established the fourteen-nation IWC, which was empowered to regulate the industry but was granted no authority to amend the convention itself. In adopting, revising, or terminating regulations the IWC is required always to follow the convention’s intent—namely, as explicitly stated in Article V, “to provide for the conservation, development, and optimum utilization of the



whale resources,” taking into consideration “the interests of the consumers of whale products and the whaling industry.” Simply put, no possible interpretation of the convention allows for putting an end to whaling when credible scientific opinion supports the sustainable use of abundant whale resources.

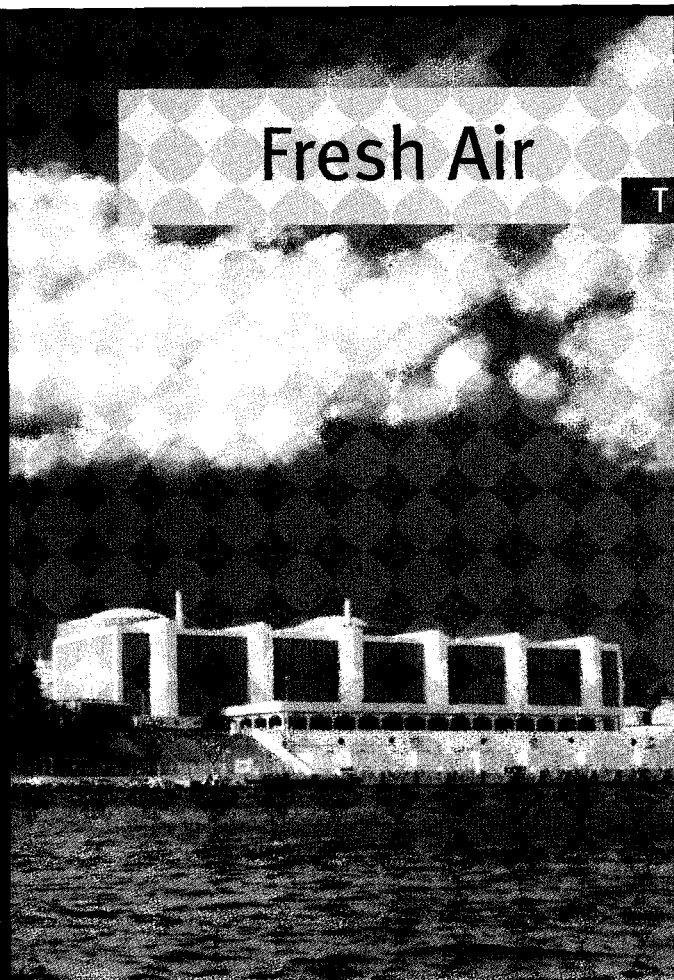
The IWC started off badly. For nearly thirty years after its inception it tolerated whaling at unsustainable levels. Many of the largest species declined so precipitously that in 1972

the United States began calling for a ten-year moratorium on all commercial whaling. The proposal was intended to shock the IWC into getting its house in order—that is, putting into effect a management system that would both maintain the whaling industry and allow whale populations to recover. When the moratorium was voted down in 1972 and 1973, activists threatened to boycott goods from whaling nations; targets included Russian vodka, Japanese cameras and TV sets, and Norwegian and Icelandic fish products. The whaling industry was forced to compromise.

**by William Aron, William Burke,
and Milton Freeman**

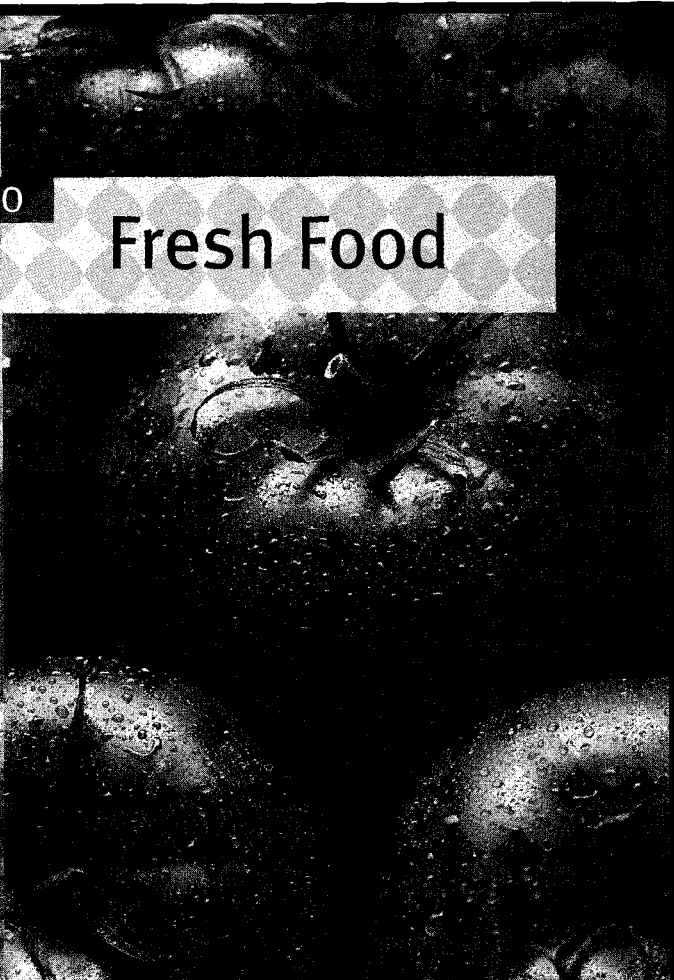
In 1974 the IWC endorsed the New Management Procedure—an Australian plan, with strong backing from the United

States, that essentially banned whaling of all overexploited stocks but permitted commercial catches of abundant stocks at levels that would not threaten their existence. The plan satisfied the IWC Scientific Committee, most of whose members had objected both to the excessive size of the earlier whale



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quotas and to the idea of a moratorium on commercial whaling, which they also viewed as excessive. The NMP took effect in the 1975–1976 whaling season. Since then not one whale population has been jeopardized by a commercial whaling operation.

Such success was not enough for the anti-whaling forces, however, who seized on the fact that the NMP called for scientific data, such as abundance estimates, growth rates, and identification of regional stocks, that were difficult to obtain with precision. Most of the Scientific Committee believed that the gaps in data were not important enough to stop controlled whaling. But the United States and other anti-whaling countries, urged on by the emerging animal-rights movement, tipped the scales in their own favor by recruiting additional nonwhaling nations to the commission—increasing its membership from the original fourteen to forty. (Any nation can accept the 1946 convention and become an equal voting member of the IWC.) Citing the alleged data-collection problems, the newly inflated IWC passed a moratorium on all commercial whaling in 1982. The vote for this moratorium marked a significant change: instead of trying to force the IWC to comply with the convention and support only sustainable whaling, the anti-whaling majority was trying to force the commission to flout it.

The slogan “Save the whale” was far more effective than “Save the particular whales threatened by overhunting.”

In a small compromise that has turned out to be an empty gesture, anti-whaling nations asked the Scientific Committee to undertake a comprehensive assessment of whale stocks by 1990—at which time the IWC was to reconsider the fate of the moratorium. The committee was also asked to develop an up-to-date re-

placement for the NMP. The result was the Revised Management Procedure, completed in 1993, which permitted whaling only if impartial systematic surveys had determined that an individual stock was not in danger. When the commission resisted even this modest plan for sustainable whaling, the chairman of the Scientific Committee quit.

In 1994 the RMP—a risk-averse successor to a management scheme that had already proved successful by terminating the harvest of all whales in jeopardy—was accepted in principle by the commission. In practice, however, the IWC has yet to allow a return to commercial whaling; instead it has deliberately dragged out negotiations over monitoring and enforcing the RMP. By focusing on increasingly arcane questions of logistics, costs, and methodology, each needing lengthy debate, the anti-whaling majority has successfully pushed the target for the whaling nations ever further into the future—a procedure that has been likened to moving the goal posts.

The cause of this charade is obvious: a majority of the IWC wants to halt all commercial whaling, no matter what the convention says. Indeed, Australia, Great Britain, New Zealand, and the United States—and, more recently, Austria and Italy—have explicitly stated that they will not approve commercial whaling under any conditions. In 1991 the Australian commissioner stated flatly that there was no longer any need to hunt “such large and beautiful animals” for food. Conceding that no scientific reason exists to ban all whaling, the U.S. commissioner announced in 1991 that he would defend the U.S. position on ethical grounds.

Such an approach, based on moral judgments rather than science, plainly violates both the convention and the international rule of law. And because anti-whaling activists will accept nothing less than a total ban, they leave no room for good-faith negotiation and compromise. The whaling industry will not cooperate in its own elimination, nor will the governments of whaling nations permit their citizens to be victimized. As a result, scientists, whalers, and activists are locked in a never-ending battle. The bitter standoff violates international law, fosters tensions between otherwise

friendly nations, and undermines environmental legislation. Worst of all, the cynical actions of the IWC’s anti-whaling majority constitute a clear warning to all nations engaged in negotiating multilateral environmental agreements: Beware, for the United States and its allies may suddenly adopt new interpretations of long-standing principles, and use them against you. Even if you accept treaties, these countries may (for purely domestic reasons) apply sanctions against you for actions fully in compliance with those treaties.

■ ■ ■

Despite guidelines accompanying the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling that refer to only twelve whale species (right, pigmy right, bowhead, humpback, blue, fin, Bryde’s, minke, sei, sperm, and Arctic and Antarctic bottlenose), many IWC members act as if the convention covered all whales—and even all cetaceans, the order of eighty-three species of aquatic mammals that also includes dolphins and porpoises. Few scientists deny that several species of whale—including the blue, the right, the bowhead, and the humpback—have been severely overhunted by commercial whalers and are now properly regarded as endangered. But almost all scientists admit that most other species are in no danger of extinction. Minke and pilot whales, for example, have populations of more than a million, and sperm whales have a population of about a million. Gray whales (probably more abundant now than ever) and some regional stocks of sei, Bryde’s, and fin whales (less abundant than in earlier times, but not dramatically so) are in no sense endangered by controlled hunts.

Unsurprisingly, researchers continue to argue that endangered species should generally not be hunted. However, the IWC allows native peoples in Alaska and Siberia to hunt limited numbers of bowhead along with gray whales to meet their needs. Neither species has been adversely affected by such hunting. Estimates of the bowhead population in the late 1970s ranged from 500 to 2,000 animals; the current bowhead population is believed to exceed 8,000. The rise in the estimate is due in part to population growth but mostly to better survey techniques. It is estimated that the gray-



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whale population has increased from about 7,000 animals in the 1930s to more than 26,000 today, despite authorized subsistence catches of 140 or more a year. The difference is thought to reflect population growth.

Just because it is possible to harvest whales without placing their populations

*No interpretation of
the convention allows
for an end to whaling
when science supports
the sustainable use of
whale resources.*

in jeopardy does not mean that the practice is acceptable. Whale protectionists often claim that whales are extremely intelligent—as smart as, if not smarter than, humankind—and that the killing of such highly sentient creatures is wrong. But whales have been studied intensively for decades, and there is still no strong evidence that they are uniquely intelligent. Many species throughout the animal kingdom demonstrate behaviors and abilities just as complex as those demonstrated by whales.

Another major objection to whaling is that it is an inhumane practice carried out unnecessarily. Let us be clear: “humane killing” is an oxymoron. The best we can hope for in killing animals is that death be as quick and as nearly painless as possible. Experience has shown that in the whaling industry this is largely achieved—just as it is in the food industries that kill millions of cattle, sheep, pigs, and chickens every day.

Some whaling-ban advocates feel that whaling has no place in the contemporary world. They point to the fact that many industrialized countries, despite having engaged in commercial whaling twenty or thirty years ago, are now fervent opponents of whaling. If this is the case, the advocates ask, why should Norway and Japan and a few other countries continue whaling? The trouble is that this argument assumes that there are

no fundamental cultural differences between whaling and nonwhaling societies: the former are simply considered to be stuck at an earlier stage of development, in need of being goosed up the ladder of progress.

Anthropologists believe otherwise. The societies that have abandoned whaling hunted whales principally for oil. Until the late 1960s whale oil was used for many purposes—in submarine guidance systems, for example, leading the Pentagon to object to listing sperm whales as an endangered species. Indeed, the IWC was established in part to ensure the profitability of the whale-oil business, which it did by setting quotas measured in units of oil. When substitutes for whale oil became available in the 1970s, nations that whaled primarily for oil stopped hunting whales.

Things were different in other nations, especially Norway and Japan, where whaling is an ancient occupation worthy of the respect and support that Americans award to, say, the running of a farm. Norwegians view whaling as part of the hard, honorable life of a fisherman—a reliable slow-season activity that helps fishing communities to make it through the year. The Japanese who come from a long line of whalers have deeply held moral beliefs about maintaining their family tradition. To be prevented from honoring their ancestors in this manner is a source of shame. After the 1982 moratorium some Norwegian fishers went bankrupt. The same thing happened in Iceland. Given the abundance of the whale stocks, these nations ask, why can’t such people be free to practice their traditional livelihood? Anthropologists have long observed the primary role played by traditional foods in the social structure and moral norms of a community—a role that is captured in the widely repeated aphorism “you are what you eat.” Asking people to give up their customary diet is in many ways like asking them to give up part of their identity.

The Japanese are particularly angered by the IWC’s ongoing failure to fulfill its legal obligations to whaling-treaty members. They point to the extensive research—much of it done by non-Japanese scientists and endorsed by the IWC Scientific Committee and the international scientific community—suggest-

ing that an interim reinstatement of coastal minke whaling (until the implementation of the RMP) would not be harmful. When such research is ignored or trivialized by the IWC itself, it is easy for the Japanese to conclude that the United States and its anti-whaling allies are irrational, dishonorable, and racially prejudiced. To Japan and other countries, a Western antagonism to whaling and to the use of whale products smacks of cultural imperialism.

To counter the pleas of countries like Norway and Japan, the anti-whaling members of the IWC assert that worldwide public opinion now opposes commercial whaling. But the convention’s acceptance of whaling is not an isolated anachronism. In recent years United Nations conferences have twice had an opportunity to oppose whaling, and have twice declined to take it. In 1982, soon after the IWC adopted the whaling moratorium, 119 states signed the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, an agreement that permits whaling on the high seas. Individual nations may forbid their nationals to take whales, and coastal states may prohibit all takes within their national waters, but unless states jointly agree otherwise, whaling can go on. In 1992 the UN Conference on Environment and Development reaffirmed the provisions of the Convention on the Law of the Sea, explicitly rejecting efforts by anti-whaling forces to exclude whales from the list of resources open to sustainable use and development. Both actions show that there is no international consensus against whaling.

Despite this lack of a consensus, in 1994 the New Zealand commissioner stated that his country would “work to maintain the moratorium on commercial whaling because it reflects the current reality of world opinion”—an assertion subsequently repeated by the British and U.S. commissioners. The evidence does not support this claim. Public-opinion polls have for years indicated that people in putatively anti-whaling countries do not know that many whale species are not near extinction—and that when they learn this fact, they are willing to support whaling. In April of last year, to cite a recent example, Responsive Management, an American polling firm specializing in environmental issues, released a survey of attitudes toward whaling in Australia,

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France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. At the outset of the survey 92 percent of those polled admitted that they knew little or nothing about minke whales, the species now of most interest to whaling countries. When informed that the minke is not endangered, that its harvest is traditional in some places, and that an IWC-managed hunt would ensure that there would be no adverse effect on whale numbers, 71 percent of U.S. respondents said they would endorse regulated whaling for minke. A majority of respondents from each of the other three nations also favored minke whaling under these conditions, though the majority was not as large.

These results are not surprising. Most people in the West know that they personally benefit from the slaughter of large numbers of food animals every year, and that in general it is perfectly lawful to take non-endangered animals in regulated hunts. Responsive Management found that only six percent of the Australian and U.S. respondents opposed whaling on the grounds of animal rights.

Perhaps sensing that informed public support for a total whaling ban would be weak, whaling-ban advocates frequently resort to campaigns that can most kindly be referred to as "artful." Despite a decades-old scientific consensus that most whale species do not face extinc-

the world waiting to resume uncontrolled whaling once the moratorium is lifted, as whaling-ban advocates also claim. What is at work here is politics—and the opportunity for anti-whaling organizations to raise substantial revenues through emotionally powerful but deceptive campaigns.

■ ■ ■

The whaling industry has done much to deserve activists' ire, and public-awareness campaigns about its behavior are laudable. But they are also simplistic and misleading—often deliberately so, to attract funding and support. The slogan "Save the whale," for example, was far more effective in awakening public concern than the scientifically correct "Save the particular whale stocks threatened by overhunting" would have been. Unfortunately, the slogan was hijacked by a small group of animal-protection activists, who mustered public support for a whaling ban by creating the false impression that all whale stocks were in danger. Politicians found it easy to follow this lead.

With the arrival of cheaper substitute oils in the early 1970s, the whaling industry in most countries approached collapse. As the small, unprofitable whaling industries in Australia, Brazil, France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Peru, Spain, and the United States closed down, no significant constituencies in those countries remained to counter the claims of activist groups, and a whaling ban became a political freebie. By militating against whaling, these countries could project an environment-friendly image abroad without antagonizing business or labor interests at home.

In the United States senators and representatives from both parties have eagerly advertised their anti-whaling credentials. In June of 1996 the House Resources Committee, not otherwise known for its commitment to environmental activism, unanimously resolved to ask the IWC to block whaling by the Makah Indian tribe of Washington state. The chief proponent of the resolution was Jack Metcalf, a Washington Republican who, *The Seattle Times* tartly noted, was regarded as having "one of the least-green voting records in Congress." And last May the Senate, fresh from its refusal even to consider a treaty on global warming, unanimously resolved to

"remain firmly opposed to commercial whaling."

In the ongoing campaign to ban whale hunting altogether, the ends do not justify the means. By spurning all attempts at compromise, today's anti-whaling crusaders have the potential to disrupt the large-scale environmental legislation of tomorrow.

To address such issues as global warming, the overuse of freshwater supplies, acid rain, overfishing in the oceans, the introduction of species to new environments, and other international environmental problems, the nations of the world will have to negotiate with one another—and for negotiations to be successful, *all* sides will have to compromise. Necessarily, the sacrifices will be harder for poor countries than for rich ones—note the reluctance of Third World nations to sign a greenhouse-gas agreement. But the sacrifices must be agreed upon and implemented in good faith. For Western nations to provide clear evidence in a highly visible forum that they are willing to flout past agreements, as they have with whaling, dims the prospect for reaching new ones in the future.

Because of the intransigence of anti-whaling nations, the IWC is rapidly becoming irrelevant. Some nations that want to whale but view the commission as a science-free forum for eco-posturing—Japan and Norway in particular—have taken advantage of the convention's provisions for opting out of IWC decisions. Other whaling nations, such as Canada and Iceland, have simply exited the IWC. Today almost all whaling is conducted by nonmembers in accordance with general international law or by IWC members ignoring the commission's (nonbinding) decisions. Fortunately, the latter nations, mainly Norway and Japan, have chosen to limit their catches to sustainable levels. But the example of an international environmental agency politicizing itself into irrelevance is alarming.

The means for protecting whale populations, allowing a resumption of controlled whaling, and rescuing the IWC from itself already exist: a plan known as the Revised Management Scheme. First proposed in 1992 by Australia, and supported by five other nations, including the United States, the

Other nations, beware: the United States and its allies may adopt new inter- pretations of long- standing principles.

tion, Greenpeace and other anti-whaling groups continue to decry a supposed illicit trade in whale products, implying that a large global market for such products exists. This has not been the case for decades, and is not likely to be so again. Nor are there large numbers of potential whaling interests anywhere in

Revised Management Scheme incorporates the Revised Management Procedure and adds an observer program and other safeguards to ensure that whaling operations do not endanger whale populations.

Under such a plan a return to large-scale commercial whaling is highly unlikely. The reasons are economic, biological, and social: Inexpensive substitutes have eliminated the market for whale oil, and the market for whale meat is very limited. The slow growth of whale populations means that large-scale whaling is unlikely even to be possible for the foreseeable future. And whales today are protected by the most important safeguard of all: an ecological awareness, which is now firmly implanted in the minds of the public and politicians alike, that nowhere existed during the ruinous heyday of industrial whaling.

Pointing to the recently revealed cheating of the Soviet Antarctic whaling fleet, whaling-ban advocates claim that the ban can't be lifted because whaling nations can't be trusted. But the cheating took place before any observer program existed. Together with other enforcement methods, observer programs have proved effective in regulating the take of dolphins in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean and of fish in the United States' exclusive economic zone of the North Pacific. An international observer program independent of the IWC was implemented last year by four North Atlantic whaling nations. But attempts to put together an observer program within the IWC are moving extremely slowly, because anti-whaling nations see that putting it in place will remove a barrier to whaling.

As a first step toward rescuing the International Whaling Commission, the Revised Management Scheme should be completed and fully implemented without further delay. Ending the charade at the IWC would induce more whaling countries to follow its dictates—and would for the first time bring most or all of the whaling industry under a science-based scheme of international regulation. It would also suggest that nations in diverse economic and cultural circumstances can cooperate and compromise for the mutual environmental good—something that will be in ever greater demand. ☸

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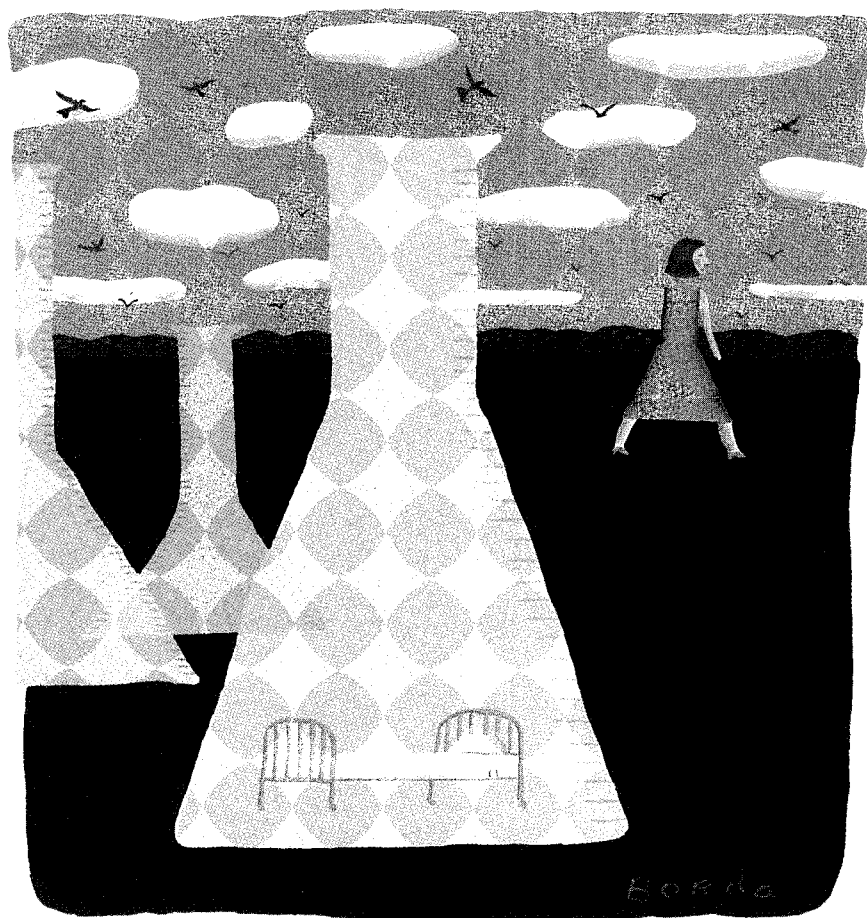


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The Clinical-Trials Bottleneck

Randomized clinical trials are the most conclusive way to test new treatments for cancer, but these trials are often resisted by patients, by doctors, and by insurers reluctant to pay for unproven therapies

JONATHON Fontilla, a thirty-five-year-old engineer, had run out of treatments for his kidney cancer. A tall, thin fellow with a pale wisp of a beard and a rural twang, Fontilla described to me how, the year before, he had decided to take part in "A Multi-center Randomized Trial of Interferon

Alfa-2a (Roferon) With or Without 13-Cis-Retinoic Acid (Accutane)." Beside him in an examining room at the University of Virginia Cancer Center, Fontilla's wife, Sandra, also thirty-five, who is a nurse, explained that the standard treatment, Interleukin II, which her husband tried after participating in the

by Francine Russo

Interferon study, had had little effect on him beyond leaving him exhausted, feverish, and in pain. And they both wanted to keep life as normal as possible for their three children. They had the clear impression that the trial had bought him nine months of relatively normal living. "I made the right decision," Fontilla said.

Fontilla had been among the fewer than three percent of adult cancer patients in the United States who are treated as part of a clinical trial. We spoke in January of last year, just days after President Bill Clinton announced his intention to devote unprecedented funding to promising new cancer research.

Media coverage of breakthroughs in the laboratory has obscured for many the grim reality that even now more patients die of cancer than are cured. Though three years ago the government announced the first-ever drop in cancer deaths, the statistics, when age-adjusted to the population, in fact represent little real change and are attributable primarily to a decrease in smoking among men. Few people understand that before new treatments can reach the more than a million people who will be found to have cancer this year, the treatments will have to trickle through a narrow bottleneck—called clinical trials—that will prolong their testing and delay their use for years. At the centers where this country's cancer patients are treated and trials are conducted, this fact, along with resistance on all sides—from patients, doctors, and health insurers—amounts to an immense problem. "As a country, we have to find a way to widen the bottleneck," Harmon Eyre, the executive vice-president for research and medical affairs at the American Cancer Society, says. "Without randomized clinical trials we might as well stop research."

The University of Virginia Cancer Center wrestles with resistance to trials as much as any cancer center in America. Located in a conservative region, it enrolled very few patients before 1994. That year Charles Myers, a prominent researcher known for developing new treatments, came to head the cancer center, and Roger Cohen, formerly a deputy division director for the Food and Drug Administration, came to direct the clinical-trials program. Myers and Cohen put

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together a staff of physician investigators who could design clinical experiments to follow through on the discoveries and hypotheses of University of Virginia laboratory scientists and others, and helped the center to qualify in 1995 as an officially designated, federally funded NCI cancer center. Fifty-eight such centers now exist.

At eight o'clock on the January morning when I visited, Roger Cohen began his clinical rounds. Forty-five years old and slight, with salt-and-pepper hair and beard and wearing wire-rimmed glasses, Cohen has the ascetic look of someone who often forgets to eat. Meticulously organized, he maintained a gentle if tense manner as he saw patient after patient, some of them participating in trials, most not.

A fifty-seven-year-old prostate-cancer patient was doing fairly well on the standard chemotherapy. He had been treated in two clinical trials that had done him very little good, but he hoped that his participation might someday help his grandsons.

A fifty-year-old forklift driver in a lung-cancer trial who had driven three hours to get to the clinic learned that his cancer had recurred. "If I took trials and they didn't work," he said with a sheepish smile, "what the hell. I'm gonna die anyway." He lifted up his plaid cap, pointed, and laughed. "I already lost all my hair."

In another examining room a fifty-three-year-old nurse, a glamorous blonde wearing suede high-button boots, reeled off in a honeyed accent the treatments that have kept her breast cancer at bay since 1989: lumpectomy, mastectomy, thirteen Taxol treatments, three adriamycin treatments, the smart bomb (a targeted radiation treatment), methotrexate and gemcitabine. Several of these had been in trials. She was worn out and close to saying "No more." But, she added, "I would do it all again." With rare times out, she had been able to babysit for her grandchild and shop and keep house for herself. She laughed. "And I aerobicize with that good-looking fella on TV at noon."

Like oncologists all over the country, Roger Cohen is frustrated. "For most of the patients, many of the treatments are wrong. Many of them are not life-extending, don't work, or have significant side

effects. The treatments that do work seem to benefit about a third of our patients. For the other two thirds the treatments are a waste of time. We just don't know which two thirds won't benefit, and we don't know what else to do. This can be solved only through cancer prevention—which is like the Holy Grail—or better therapy. We figured out how to cure the few cancers we can cure by the systematic and relentless application of clinical trials."

THE first randomized clinical trial in medicine occurred in 1946, when the British tested streptomycin as a cure for tuberculosis. The first trials in cancer began in the United States in 1958, with the National Surgical Adjuvant Breast and Bowel Project, which first tested chemotherapy—unsuccessfully—for breast cancer. In the 1970s trials became more numerous. Notable were two large NSABP studies, conducted from 1971 to 1985, that showed that the less disfiguring "total mastectomy" and lumpectomy were as likely to help breast-cancer patients as the Halsted radical mastectomy, which had been the accepted treatment since 1890. The National Cancer Institute now lists 1,500 active cancer trials, some sponsored by the NCI, some by drug companies alone or in partnership with the NCI, and many by the Coalition of National Cancer Cooperative Groups, whose 12,000 cancer researchers across the country are supported by both the NIH and private industry.

Many people imagine that a new drug is developed in the lab, tested in human beings, and approved—boom: a new treatment. Few realize how excruciatingly slowly cancer research moves. A drug ready to be tested in human beings is first used in a Phase I trial, in which perhaps two dozen people, in groups of three, take varying doses to establish a maximum safe dose. Then another small group receives it in a Phase II trial to test the drug's effectiveness. If at this stage it looks promising (and often it does not), the drug will enter a randomized Phase III trial, involving hundreds, perhaps thousands, of patients at several hospitals, typically over three to five years. A Phase III is considered a success (and few are) if the new drug extends median survival by 25 percent, which might be as little as three months.

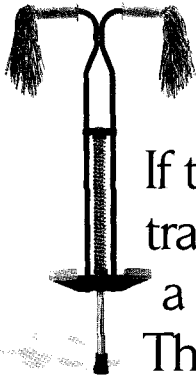
Even after a drug is approved, further

randomized studies may be needed to answer such questions as Will this drug work against other cancers? Does it work against early as well as advanced disease? Is it more effective given over time or all at once? Alone or with other drugs, and in what combinations? The announcement in February that chemotherapy added to radiation could reduce rates of death from cervical cancer by 30 to 50 percent emerged from five separate studies. Every other recent major advance in cancer also emerged from clinical trials, including the discoveries that Tamoxifen could help prevent breast cancer in high-risk women, that Taxol could benefit women with early as well as advanced breast cancer, and that Herceptin could shrink tumors in certain women with advanced breast cancer. Each of these discoveries will require further trials to refine these treatments. Angiostatin and Endostatin, which created excitement in the media when shown to eradicate tumors in mice, have yet to be tested in any clinical trials on people.

For a variety of reasons, few patients are given the opportunity to participate in trials, and this has a range of unfortunate consequences. Some trials have had to be abandoned for lack of patients. Others, such as those for relatively rare kinds of cancer, can never be done at all. Getting answers to important questions can take years. Moreover, the elderly, a burgeoning group among those who will require treatment, are seriously underrepresented in clinical trials, as are minorities and, in some areas, women. The picture is very different for cancers in children. Ninety-five percent of children with cancer in the United States were enrolled in studies in the 1970s and 1980s. Seventy-five percent of cancers in children are now curable. No one can predict this outcome for the myriad of very different adult cancers, but vastly increased participation in adult-cancer studies would surely bring cures faster. Already trials have led to major advances in the treatment of melanoma and cancers of the breast, the cervix, the uterus, the prostate, and the bladder.

IN the public imagination the ghosts of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study still haunt clinical research. Recent events, such as the controversies over AZT-and-placebo trials for AIDS in Africa and over some psychiatric experiments, have revived the negative associations with

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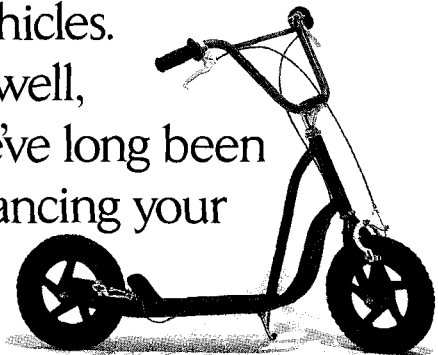
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experimentation on human beings. But placebos are almost never used in cancer research except to test ancillary treatments, such as anti-nausea drugs, or in prevention studies with healthy patients. A typical trial today will place patients in groups that receive only slightly different treatments—the “standard treatment” versus some new wrinkle on it.

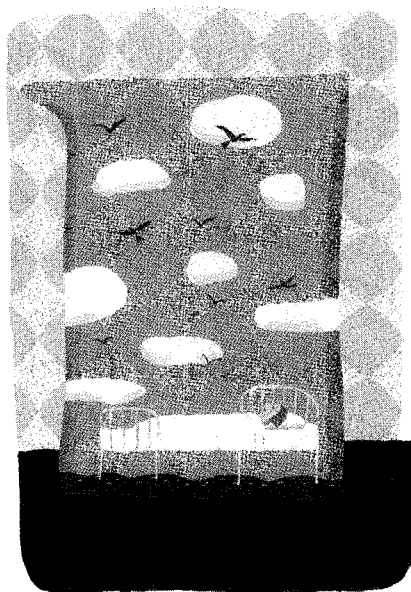
Still, researchers constantly wrestle with ethical questions. For example, should desperate patients be asked to participate in Phase I studies, the only purpose of which is to measure toxicity, when experts estimate that only four to six percent of patients who do take part in them derive any benefit? Unsurprisingly, surveys show that patients participate because they hope they *will* benefit. Some physicians worry about giving dying patients false hope, while others argue that access to new drugs gives the patients in trials a psychological advantage. Ethicists also struggle with the question of what constitutes truly free and informed consent, since surveys have shown that many patients do not understand the consent forms they signed upon entering a trial. Is total disclosure best? Some surveys indicate that too much information makes patients anxious.

Randomizing probably gives rise to the most concern. In the past the randomized-trials requirement was criticized for slowing down the delivery of experimental drugs to patients who would certainly die without them. But the FDA's fast-tracking policy, initiated in 1992, has blunted criticism. Now, in the rare cases when Phase I and II studies suggest that a new treatment can benefit patients suffering from a disease for which few if any standard treatments exist, such as advanced breast cancer or AIDS, the FDA will approve the treatment without a Phase III.

Ethically, a patient may be randomly assigned to one of several treatments only when the physician—or the larger medical community, as its opinions are reflected in a review board for the study—is uncertain which treatment is better for the patient. But Emil Freireich, of the M. D. Anderson Cancer Center, in Houston, a pioneer in conquering leukemia, says what few doctors will admit they think: “The new treatment is *always* preferred, because it must have shown evidence of potential superiority over con-

ventional therapy to justify the additional risk.” In fact no one knows how often the new treatment is better. Few centralized records are kept, and because negative studies are usually not published as prominently as positive ones, the impression persists that the new treatment wins out a majority of the time.

Perhaps, suggests Richard Simon, who heads the group that reviews statistical and other results of all NCI trials, doctors' views are distorted by the attention given promising Phase II trials, many of which do not pan out in Phase III. Simon estimates that no more than 20 percent of experimental treatments are successful, that the vast majority of the remainder



are equivalent to the standard treatment, and that a few are actually worse. “If it were true,” he asserts, “that the new treatment was *usually* better, cancer would be cured by now.” At least negative studies help to limit the large-scale use of toxic or ineffective treatments. However, recent advances in tumor biology have opened up promising new avenues of treatment. Researchers believe that the proportion of successful trials will increase as patients with molecularly homogeneous cancers are grouped together and treated with agents that target only the cells that cause cancer.

In every trial the physician investigators must consider how funding and the prospect of career advancement might influence their behavior. Patients should ask, as candid clinicians put it, What’s in this for *you*, doctor? Money, advancement, your name on a paper? The NCI’s

patient booklet suggests asking “Who has reviewed and approved the study? How are the study data and patient safety being checked?”

Ethical problems—in one case, even fraud—have arisen. However, trials conducted by the National Institutes of Health at least are backed by a consensus of acknowledged experts that the potential for benefit outweighs the potential for harm to study subjects.

Since the explosion of trials in the 1970s, and the passage of legislation requiring that trials take place before the FDA approves a new treatment, patient protection has increased. Every hospital must have an institutional review board (IRB), composed of independent doctors, patients, and community members, to scrutinize studies for undue risk and possible bias—for example, in favor of a trial that might make money for the hospital from insurance or drug companies. Though the Inspector General’s Office of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services last June issued a report criticizing IRBs for all areas of medical research as being too overworked and underinformed to protect patients in trials adequately, Mark Yessian, a regional inspector general, says, “In NCI-sponsored trials there is a degree of oversight that doesn’t exist in other research.”

The greatest protection for patients is their freedom to leave a trial at any time, for any reason, without penalty. If they are not doing well, their doctors will remove them: patients are not left to languish for years on treatments that don’t help them. The sort of controversy that erupted recently over Schering-Plough’s refusal to release viral-load information to hepatitis-C patients in a study it sponsored is unknown in cancer trials, in which the benchmark is most often tumor growth or recurrence. Moreover, if within a short time—even months—a cancer study shows that one treatment is better than another, the trial is closed and everyone gets the better treatment, if possible.

“Being a guinea pig is often the best thing that can happen to a patient,” Roger Cohen insists. No body of hard data is available to support this assertion, but a few studies do show higher survival rates for those participating in trials. And the quality of care and level of follow-up in cancer trials is almost universally considered to be the very highest.

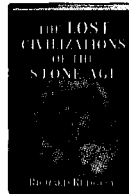
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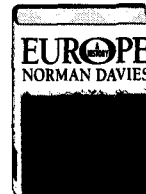
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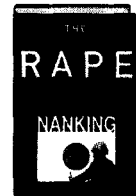
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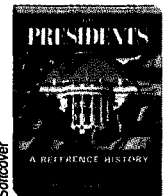
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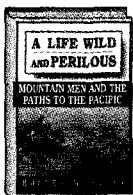
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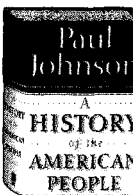
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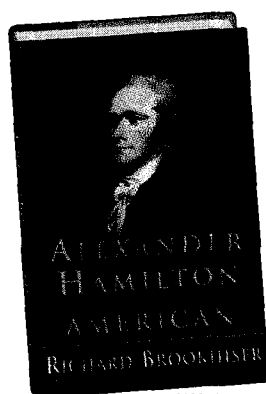
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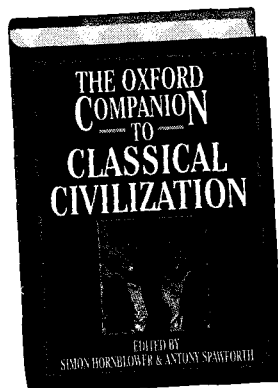
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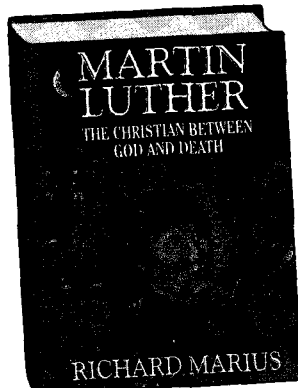
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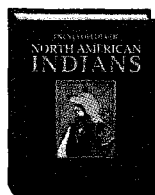
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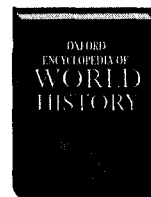
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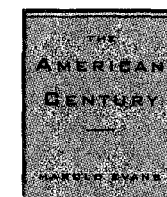
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Why do so few patients enter trials when virtually every patient-advocacy group supports them? "We encourage people to go on peer-reviewed trials such as those conducted by the NCI," says Susan Scherr, of the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship, "but a lot of patients still think of rats in a cage or experiments where one person gets a sugar pill. And they arrive thinking existing cancer treatment is more effective than it is." Media hype has created a "credibility gap," Richard Simon says, because "the public is repeatedly bombarded by reports of promising high-tech magic bullets" even as death rates from most cancers remain fairly steady.

Many patients don't actually know what trials are. Recent NCI surveys found that the majority of Americans were unfamiliar with the term "clinical trial," and fewer than five percent could name the National Cancer Institute as the federal agency that funds most cancer research. When randomized trials are explained to them, patients are often puzzled by the doctor's statement "We just don't know which treatment is better—that's why we're doing this study." Many will look for a doctor who claims to know. One survey found that 70 percent of a patient group believed that their doctors actually knew which treatment in a study was better.

When patients strongly prefer one treatment to another, they will refuse to be randomized. For example, some are sure—despite inconclusive data—that autologous bone-marrow transplant, a treatment that involves a virulently toxic form of chemotherapy, is the most effective breast-cancer treatment. But even as their efforts led several states to mandate insurance coverage for it, a current NCI study to compare it with standard chemotherapy was prolonged by more than five years because too few patients enrolled. Preliminary reports released in March indicate that this treatment may be of questionable benefit.

IN the University of Virginia Cancer Center's clinical-trials library Roger Cohen lifts a large looseleaf binder off a bookshelf packed with identical-looking volumes and flips through page after page of forms filled out by hand—the required record-keeping for one patient in one study. Physicians are reimbursed by

insurance companies for neither the extra paperwork nor the time necessary to obtain "informed consent"—from a minimum of fifteen minutes or so to the twelve hours one pediatric oncologist spent explaining a trial to a child's family. And doctors other than the chief investigator typically receive no credit or career advancement for their participation.

Karen Parks, the clinical-research coordinator at the University of Virginia, is responsible for submitting data to regulators and documenting progress. "We've also started marketing for doctors," she says, showing a colored sheet listing more than fifty trials by category. Though the effort is intended to make doctors more aware of available trials and to facilitate enrolling patients, many physicians at the center still don't participate.

"Doctors won't say they don't believe in clinical trials," Cohen says. "It's like saying you don't believe in God. They just don't enroll patients." In fact, 80 percent of patients are enrolled by just 10 percent of doctors. Physicians are troubled by the same uncertainty that troubles patients, but they do not like to acknowledge it. "You walk in someplace Friday night," one physician said in a survey of oncologists, "and somebody is sick and they need treatment; the last thing they want to hear is, 'Well, maybe this treatment is best and maybe that treatment is best and we don't know.' That isn't going to win you any friends."

Though patients are increasingly likely to question their doctors, Charles Myers explains, dangerously ill people have traditionally wanted what the medical literature calls "the omnipotent servant." Doctors are loath to relinquish their freedom to make decisions individually for patients, which a trial protocol restricts. "My patients come to me because of my experience" is a frequent explanation for a physician's nonparticipation. "But there's a whole literature on the abysmal track record of doctors using their own experience," Myers laments. Trials proponents can reel off case after case in which accepted treatments proved wrong. In the 1940s castration plus estrogen was used to try to cure prostate cancer, but a randomized trial in the 1950s showed that patients taking estrogen died sooner. A famous study in the 1980s showed that men taking the drugs then univer-

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sally prescribed to correct an abnormal heartbeat had almost three times as great a risk of dying after a heart attack as those on a placebo. Proponents also decry doctors'—and patients'—unsubstantiated assumption that in cancer treatment more is always better. Though many studies prove that more-punishing treatments (administering the drug combination CMF—cyclophosphamide, methotrexate, and five-fluorouracil—to breast-cancer patients for twelve months instead of six, for example) do not necessarily benefit patients, some doctors still avoid enrolling patients in studies that may seem to treat them less aggressively than is usual.

The medical literature shows that physicians are often prisoners of their firsthand experience: their refusal to accept even conclusive studies is legendary. Willie Andersen, a gynecologic oncologist at the University of Virginia, believes in clinical trials and enrolls patients in them but still has to struggle against the power of his own experience. Andersen says that despite trials showing the drug Topotecan to be effective against ovarian cancer, he rarely chooses it because he has never had good luck with it himself. "I think, 'The last time, that lady got *so* sick,'" he says. "Bias is very hard. It's easier when you're dealing with test tubes and experimental animals, but when it's real people looking you in the eye, you get wrapped up in their hopes and your hopes for their hopes, and it's *hard*."

In our talks Roger Cohen was initially critical of nonparticipating doctors as unscientific or getting a "free ride" by using trial results without contributing. But after several days of my questioning him about these doctors' problems, his tone softened. "I understand," he said, "how people of good intentions might not want to enroll patients: they are genuinely too busy; they get no academic credit; the hypotheses are formulated by anonymous committees; and trials are intrusive and disruptive to one's practice, greatly prolong and intensify the patient experience (in some good but also some unpleasant ways), and introduce still more uncertainty and vulnerability into an uncertain and vulnerable situation—having cancer in the first place." What motivates Cohen, he says, is that half of cancer patients die, usually within a year,

and death rates have scarcely budged in thirty years. "Those two facts mean that for me the only ethical way to practice medicine is through clinical trials. I do not know another way out of the box."

SEVERAL times a year Cohen will try to persuade a patient's insurance company to cover the costs of a trial. "I have found," he says, "that if one is reasonable, patient, gives timely notice of one's plans, is respectful, and buttresses the argument with data and articles, the answer is usually yes. Screaming at them does not work."

The temptation to scream must sometimes be great. Insurers, including Medicare, have often refused to reimburse for care in a trial even when the patient would receive the identical treatment outside the trial. And they object that trials may require additional expensive procedures, to establish a patient's eligibility or just to collect data. They also worry about the expense of treating side effects. Moreover, although doctors may assert that trials cost no more, they lack data to prove this. Political pressure has resulted in a number of initiatives, including a landmark agreement reached in February between the National Institutes of Health and the American Association of Health Plans, which represents HMOs. The trade group will encourage member HMOs to pay the routine care costs for patients in NIH-sponsored trials as long as they are not significantly higher than costs for standard treatment. United Healthcare has already agreed to cover these costs for any of its six million covered members who enroll in trials sponsored by the Coalition of National Cancer Cooperative Groups.

On the government side, several studies to make cost comparisons and efforts to mandate coverage are now under way. The American Society of Clinical Oncology and a host of patient-advocacy groups have joined together to support the Medicare Cancer Clinical Trial Coverage Act of 1997, sponsored by Senators Jay Rockefeller and Connie Mack, which calls for a pilot study to compare routine cancer-patient costs for Medicare beneficiaries who are enrolled in cancer clinical trials with those for beneficiaries who are not. The NCI is conducting similar studies with Kaiser/Permanente and the Mayo Clinic.

In his 1998 State of the Union Address President Clinton urged research funding "so that ours will be the generation that finally wins the war against cancer." To this end the National Cancer Institute plans to devote \$425.5 million of its proposed \$3.191 billion 1999 budget to widen the clinical-trials bottleneck in several ways: by increasing the number of patients in trials (the goal is a fivefold increase by 2003), by creating additional NCI cancer centers, by further developing an electronic database for doctor and patient information, and by lessening the burdens on doctors—for example, by funding positions for data managers. The NCI will also direct an all-out education effort at the medical community and the public.

No one suggests that every patient should enroll in a trial or that every trial is worthwhile. But patients should be able to make an informed choice. With a patient-advocacy structure to guide them, they are more likely to inspire vigilance against trials tainted by bias or self-interest. Scrutiny by patient-advocacy groups may help to identify those trials that are well designed and will answer important questions. A "Summit on Clinical Trials" held last July, near Washington, D.C., brought together advocates, leading cancer investigators, and representatives of government and drug companies to address some of these issues. The strategies they agreed on include setting standards for quality trials and working to raise participation from two to three percent of adult cancer patients to 10 to 15 percent. Simply amassing more patients will not solve all the problems of the trials process, but large, representative, and timely studies ought to produce more-conclusive and earlier results.

As I left the University of Virginia, Roger Cohen told me that he had tried that morning, unsuccessfully, to persuade the young father with kidney cancer to enter hospice care. Cohen's only remaining option was to give him more and more morphine for his pain. "I want to find something that will extend lives by years, not days and months," he said, "to make cancer a manageable illness, like heart disease or diabetes. When there's a Jonathon Fontilla twenty years from now, I hope to have more to treat him with than I do now." ☞

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Six Days

On learning a new alphabet

IN the classroom where I tutor, a five-year-old boy is fighting with the letter *E*. With knees bent and shoulders cocked, he is poised on his bench as though ready to pounce. His whole being is devoted to this singular, monumental task. I focus on him over the din of the classroom. I see the blunt pencil caught in his grip, and I realize that an entire process is beginning again. Tens of thousands of years of evolution are being re-enacted right in front of me.

E. Look! This simple figure, an outstretched claw. Or three branches, anchored by a trunk as solid and certain as a Joshua tree. It existed in the early Canaanite alphabet, which developed around 1700 B.C. and is the oldest known. At the time, it was a consonant and faced the

other way. But within a thousand years it had become a vowel and had taken its current form among the letters of Ancient Greek. Today it is the most common letter in the English language. It has survived this long, and barring a wholesale conversion to binary code, it should see our species to extinction.

by Jesse Wegman

I have been mulling over this kind of thing lately because I, too, have been learning an alphabet. I am learning to speak Modern Greek, and to do this I first had to master the Greek alphabet: twenty-four characters, at once as strange as a lemur and as perfectly familiar as a street sign. I remind myself that this new alphabet is the foundation of my own—that without it everything I know about letters

and words would be entirely different. Still, I regard these ancient symbols as latecomers.

WHEN you are learning a new language, the sounds guide you. Your energy is devoted to apprehending strange phonetic combinations and barely discernible stresses. But when you are learning a new alphabet, your sensitivity is directed to the minute facts of form. A is no longer just A but an odd fusion of shapes—lazy slants propped up and apart by a firm crossbar. A triangle with poor boundary control. Or two lovers leaning across a table, kissing. And so it is with the Greek letters. Thanks to the Etruscans, most of the letters that found their way across the sea made it into the Roman alphabet, from which ours is derived. The ones that didn't carry over we still know if we are fraternity or sorority members or students of the classics or of physics. But how carefully do we really look?

There is xi (ξ), a beautiful two-humped sea horse, pronounced—or sneezed—*ksee*, and there is a delicately pierced bowl, psi (ψ), pronounced *psee*. There is theta (Θ), pronounced *theeta*, elegant and timeless, a circle not quite bisected so that top and bottom bleed into each other, and gamma (Γ), a tree struck by lightning. Then there is eta, pronounced *eeta*, a simple-sounding letter that leads us on a wonderful transalphabetic journey. Eta always sounds like our long *e*, but its uppercase looks like our *H*, while its lowercase resembles our *n*. The *n* sound in Greek is represented in lowercase by a character resembling our *v*. One of the *v* sounds in Greek looks like our *u* unless it is uppercase, and then it looks like our *Y*, which can also sound like our long *e*—and we are back at eta.

I am going to all this trouble because I fell in love with a Greek girl during my first year in college. She was a fierce, proud thunderclap of a soul with tightly coiled hair and eyes like Kalamata olives. She had the habit of slipping back and forth between English and Greek mid-sentence, depending on the versatility of the words available to her at the moment. Seeing that I had no choice in the matter, I went out and bought a Greek phrase book, the last few pages of which

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contained a wonderfully injudicious English-Greek lexicon. Here I was offered the Greek word for “rangefinder” (*apostasiometro*), but a translation for “if” was nowhere to be found. I am still waiting for the chance to say “Excuse me, where is your rangefinder?”

In the face of dire warnings to the contrary, I skipped over the more ponderous sections of my phrase book and came to rest on the alphabet page. I practiced the characters over and over, big and bold across clean sheets of notebook paper, small and studied down the margin of my introductory-psychology textbook. I put the uppercase of each letter next to the lowercase, as on the green banners that wrap around kindergarten classrooms. The final flourish of a lowercase xi, the reverse hook and belly of a small zeta (ζ), carved like a chant into my memory. Forty-eight symbols I would count—and I always counted.

Eventually I committed the alphabet to memory, and could recite it like a pledge, with a fine accent. In the process I became something of a pronunciation snob. I reminded myself of a tourist who has stayed somewhere just long enough to develop a measured disdain for his newly arrived compatriots, cringing when I was invited to a party at Kye Sye, or when my statistics professor asked us to calculate the *sigmuh* of voting trends in Dubuque. *Seeghma*, I thought. *Soften the g*. Here was I—a student to whom Achilles was a tendon and Homer a Simpson—suddenly fancying myself one of the last outposts of classical civilization.

This attitude didn’t win me many friends. But I did start reading more, and I imagined myself a kindred spirit of Eric Partridge, the distinguished etymologist who, in the introduction to his *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, wrote of his method, “The transliteration of Greek words, in particular, has been more exact than in several dictionaries one might, but does not, name.”

I also discovered that it is less complicated to love a language than to love a person, and so when things with the Greek girl didn’t go as planned, I managed instead to fall madly in love with Greek. It is not difficult to do this. Spoken Greek grabs you and wraps you up in its soothing, rapid-fire cadences. No wonder we’ve looked to Greece for so

many of our great oratorical traditions: the language seems built purely to indulge the pleasure of speaking. But it does more than that. I have found that Greeks seem to have an instinctive and deep understanding of the basis of their language. It is as if Greek itself were encoded with the tools to decipher its history; the more you speak, the more you learn. And the more you learn, the more you discover that in a culture that thrives on debate, language is no less debatable than anything else.

Take *aletheia*, for instance. Loosely translated, it is Greek for “truth.” Why? The German philosopher Martin Heidegger offered a carefully reasoned—and poetic—etymology. The root *lath* in Greek means “to be concealed,” he explained, and the prefix *a-* means “without.” So to be truthful in Greek, according to Heidegger, is literally to reveal, to uncover—a better lesson than could ever be learned from our abstract notions of “accuracy” or “authenticity.”

Giorgos Patios thinks this is absurd. Giorgos was my waiter at the Taverna Gorgona, a well-kept roadside café in Perissa, on the Greek island of Santorini. I had gone to the Gorgona to avoid the sun, drink strong coffee, and stare out at the street—that is, to be like a Greek man. With my practiced accent and command of pleasantries, I thought I fit in nicely. The sun-bleached *Herald Tribune* on my table was a mistake.

Giorgos came over and started talking to me in English. Soon we were on to the subject of language, and I asked him about *aletheia*. He gave me a long, convoluted answer that sounded well rehearsed and had nothing to do with uncovering anything. So Heidegger didn’t have it right? I asked. “Of course not,” Giorgos replied. But Heidegger was a student of Ancient Greek, I protested. Giorgos smiled a dismissive, chipped-tooth smile at me. “Heidegger was a clown,” he said.

So there.

BACK in the classroom, I hold my gaze on the unnoticed boy. Of course, he doesn’t care about any of this; he just wants to write his *E*. But the *E* is fighting back. I am lucky to witness this, I think. In slow, patient steps, the boy is teaching himself movements, groups of movements, that we have never stopped

trying to master. In his naiveté the boy draws the branches of the *E* first, and connects them after. No adult would spend enough time on one letter to make this method worthwhile.

But maybe we’ve forgotten something important. After all, the ability to see things in pieces is at the heart of two of the biggest developments in the history of writing: the alphabet and the movable-type printing press. In our day, of course, it is the basis of the computer. Ones and zeroes—the simplicity permits the complexity.

Today the boy writes in pieces. Branch, branch, branch, trunk. But as he becomes more comfortable fitting together these odd groups of shapes—these trees, fingers, swans, sea horses—he will stop seeing them. Soon, like all the older children, he will be writing just letters.

Maybe that’s why I feel this strange connection to him now: we are both following these shapes through their tangled histories, watching them in all their mysterious transformations. We feel the same excitement and wonder that the early Semitic scribes must have felt as they realized that each syllable of their language could be separated into discrete characters. *Aleph-beth*. They saw more than just the shapes too. *Aleph* is ancient Hebrew for “ox”; turn *A* upside down and see what you get. The alphabet is not just letters; it is alive.

James Ussher, the seventeenth-century Irish archbishop best known for his painstaking calculation of the moment when light was created (at midday on October 23, 4004 B.C.), also understood the necessity of learning piece by piece. Indeed, he considered it divinely ordained. Why should Creation as a whole have happened over six days, rather than in one timeless, inconceivable instant? “To teach us the better to understand their workmanship,” Ussher reasoned, “even as a man which will teach a child in the frame of a letter, will first teach him one line of the letter, and not the whole letter together.”

Soon the boy will discover all this for himself. But not before going through the necessary steps. First branches, then trunk. First one way, then the other. *E* is as simple, and as complex, as it will ever be. ☼

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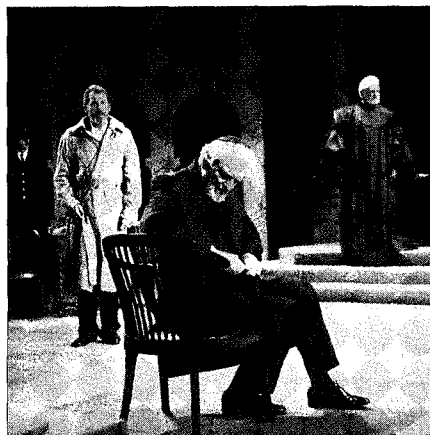
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CAPITAL COMMERCE

Too bad someone didn't remind Congress that the quality of mercy is not strained. With the partisan politics on display in our nation's capital of late, the last line one would expect to ring true is Portia's famous exhortation from *The Merchant of Venice*. Washington's Shakespeare Theatre, however, has recently been trumping expectations regularly. Last season the company presented Patrick Stewart as a white Othello in a race-bending production; earlier this year it exhumed the little-known *King John* to critical acclaim. This month it tops the season off with Mark Twain's most famous impersonator, Hal Hol-



The Merchant of Venice

brook, taking on Shylock. Holbrook's career-long infatuation with Twain (he first portrayed the irascible writer in a one-man show more than forty years ago, winning a Tony Award in 1966) is frequently leavened by stints in film, television (he's won five Emmy Awards), and classic stage roles (he recently played Willy Loman, and first assayed Shylock in 1991). Michael Kahn, the artistic director, stages Shakespeare's problematic play with help from three members of the *King John* team: the dean of American set design, Ming Cho Lee; the lighting designer Howell Binkley; and the composer Adam Wernick. May the play's moral—that true friendship can't be bought or bound by rigid readings of the law—resound in Washington. —J.I.

Nancy Dalva's essays appear in the magazine twice. John Isel is the editor-in-chief of Stagebill.

For many of its fans, one of the deep and abiding pleasures of going to the ballet is recurrence—that is, seeing a beloved work again and again. As with reading, familiarity breeds content. But for a certain segment of the balletomane population, and for a significant segment of ballet funders, something new is always better by far than something old. Indeed, the occasional novelty (and I must add here that to the purist, novelty is a depressing rather than a cheering notion) does add a certain frisson to any season. At New York City Ballet the spring program usually brings a number of fresh items, and this year is no exception. In addition to the blockbuster offering—a new *Swan Lake* by Peter Martins—there are smaller dances. Here what one really wants is to see something full of promise. In that regard I am placing my bets on the Englishman Christopher Wheeldon, whose newest dance is being performed

STRAVINSKY SPRING



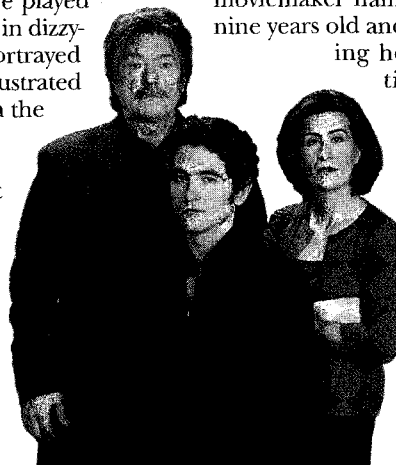
Christopher Wheeldon

by the students at the School of American Ballet as part of this year's Stravinsky Festival (May 19 and 22). Wheeldon himself is not so far out of school; he trained at Britain's Royal Ballet School and joined its company in 1991. Two years later he emigrated to NYCB, where he now holds the rank of soloist. Last spring he made a work for the company called *Slavonic Dances*. It was intelligent; rather than denying tradition, it made good use of ballets that had gone before. It was appropriate—an actual ballet using actual ballet steps, which is not always the case. (Renegade genius is truly uncommon, but taste and sense serve well in its absence.) Wheeldon's dance had an internal logic and a consistent tone that fell somewhere between elegy and romance. Best of all, it was beautiful, with great swooping movements, grand lifts, and an ardent spirit. It made one hopeful. Novelty comes and goes, but beauty never goes out of style. —N.D.

RELATIVITY THEORY

One of the charms of *The Family Business*, the choreographer and director David Gordon's award-winning collaboration with his wife, Valda Setterfield, and his son, Ain Gordon, was its mordant and moving combination of reality and fiction. Related stage characters were played by real-life relatives, but in dizzying dimensions: Ain portrayed father and son, both frustrated artists making a living in the family plumbing operation; David played the terminally ill aunt whom the two men must nurse. And this is not the only Gordon collaboration: David and Ain worked together on the slapstick *Punch and Judy Get Divorced*. This season the duo re-teams at the

American Conservatory Theater, in San Francisco, for *The First Picture Show*, a multimedia musical about the early days of silent film. With songs by the heralded newcomer Jeanine Tesori (*Violet*), the play focuses on a filmmaker named Jane Furstman who discovers that an early moviemaker named Anne First, ninety-nine years old and abandoned in a nursing home, is a distant relative. Their reconnection brings catharsis, a theme common in the Gordons' work, invariably brought to life in a bold theatrical vernacular that is as distinctive and determinative as a slice of DNA. —J.I.



David Gordon, Ain Gordon, and Jeanine Tesori

Film

BY ELLA TAYLOR

FIRE AND ICE

The *Lovers of the Arctic Circle* is the kind of pretty love story that makes critics abandon their faculties and go all gooey. Without a doubt the movie is elegiac in tone and gorgeous to look at, but in the service of a wool-gathering romanticism so daffy that by the time it's over you may be scratching your head and wondering what all that lyricism was for. Ana and Otto (played by assorted decorative Spanish actors at different ages) meet as eight-year-olds when each is reeling from disaster: her father has died, his parents are separated. A series of preposterous coincidences turn them into brother and sister and then, inevitably, lovers. Switching back and forth between the two points of view,



Fele Martínez and Najwa Nimri

Spanish director Julio Medem piles his movie high with more adversity than any actors can reasonably be expected to suffer without dying of laughter. Ana and Otto's relationship grows on a seedbed of tragedy and an inexplicable mutual interest in the farther reaches of Finland, which is where, after a suitable period of estrangement, the two are fated to reunite. Dark eyes meet at languorous intervals against a background of stunning landscapes. When Ana announces, "I'm waiting for the coincidence of my life," one suspects that something lofty has been said about the intersection of chance and romantic destiny. One is damned if one knows what it is.

PLAYING WITH MATCHES

Understandably, the preferred mode of current films about the former Yugoslavia is the cinema of the absurd. Set on a single night in Belgrade, which is laboring under a repressive regime and is cut off from the outside world by an embargo, *The*



Lazar Ristovski and Dragan Nikolic

Powder Keg opens with a cabaret artist warning his audience, "You're in for it." So we are: though far from any scenes of battle, the city is infected with the mad anarchy of the Balkan war. Adapted from a play by the young Macedonian playwright Dejan Dukovski, the

movie tracks a group of ordinary people, linked to one another in the manner of *la ronde* as they negotiate their way through a night of arbitrary violence and shocking brutality, interspersed with (all too few) moments of unexpected kindness. After an upsetting confession from his best friend, an aging boxer kills the friend, and then terrorizes a helpless woman on a train. A former professor from Sarajevo, who refuses to demean himself by working for the local mob, drives a bus; his bus is hijacked, and a young woman passenger is sexually harassed. She escapes to apparent safety with her boyfriend, whereupon the two are promptly kidnapped. Meanwhile, a man returns from abroad with a full-dress symphony orchestra to win back the woman he earlier abandoned. Like his colleague Emir Kusturica (*Underground*), Serbian-born director Goran Paskaljevic chooses to filter the Balkan tragedy through black comedy. Though *The Powder Keg* is fluidly directed and visually striking, it seems to have little purpose beyond an obsessive and rather gloating need to rub our noses in a circus of ill will.

A LOST GENERATION

In *Xiu Xiu: The Sent Down Girl*, a first feature film from actress Joan Chen (*The Last Emperor*, *Heaven and Earth*), a tailor's young daughter growing up in the last days of Mao's Cultural Revolution is abruptly "sent down" to the countryside in 1975 to learn horse-herding, with the promise that when she returns she will lead her own all-girl cavalry unit. Little does she know that the Revolution is on its last legs and the unit has long since been disbanded. Billeted in a ragged tent with a taciturn Tibetan herder, the naive Xiu Xiu (played by the beautiful sixteen-year-old Chinese actress Lu Lu) pines for home, indifferent both to her lovely natural surroundings and to the quiet integrity of her host (played by Tibetan actor Lopsang, a former accountant), a castrate who loves his young charge with a hopeless love and tries to save her from repeated exploitation by men who promise her a passage home in return for sexual favors. Adapted by Chen and the Chinese writer Yan Geling from Yan's novella, *Xiu Xiu* is a tribute to the martyrs of Chen's generation, the last to



Lu Lu in *Xiu Xiu: The Sent Down Girl*

come of age under Mao's perversion of socialism. For all its subtitled dialogue and local setting (Lu Yue, cinematographer to acclaimed director Zhang Yimou, shot the movie along the border between Sichuan and Tibet, without the permission of the Chinese government), the movie owes little to the aesthetic of Asian film. Conventionally Western in pacing, dialogue, and narrative, this modestly charming fable carries a very American message about the triumph of individual love over collective adversity.

Ella Taylor is a film critic for LA Weekly.

The steak.



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Popular Music and Jazz

BY BOB BLUMENTHAL AND CHARLES M. YOUNG

BECK IS BACK

One of the formative influences on heavy metal when he joined the Yardbirds, in 1965, Jeff Beck has gone through almost as many changes of sound as David Bowie has costumes. The one constant in his career has been a unique capacity to yank overwhelmingly intense emotion out of the electric guitar. Indeed, of the great sixties guitar heroes, he's probably the only one still at his peak, still challenging the long-deceased Jimi Hendrix for MVP. On *Who Else!* (Epic), Beck dazzles us again with his versatility, ranging from techno ("THX138") to traditional Irish ("Declan") to solo fingerpicking ("Another Place") to jazz/metal ("What Mama Said") to jazz/Arabic ("Blast From the East"). Eleven cuts, and they're all devastating, which is really something to say about an album with no vocals. Even Hendrix took time off to sing. The secret of Beck's sustained musical imagination



Jeff Beck—*Who Else!*

is his note bending. Just when you think he's wrung the last possible drop of emotion from a note, he gives the string another vibrato yank and your critical faculties are reduced to an inarticulate hippie exclamation such as "Wuhhh!!!" He's also pressing all the right buttons on his computer and hiring all the right backup musicians, among them Tony Hymas and Jan Hammer on keyboards, Jennifer Batten (formerly with Michael Jackson) on second guitar, and the fabulous rhythm section Randy Hope-Taylor on bass and Steve Alexander on drums. Beck has scheduled a tour this spring. That may or may not mean he's actually going to play it, but buying a ticket is a chance worth taking.

—C.M.Y.

Bob Blumenthal is a jazz critic for The Boston Globe. Charles M. Young reviews popular music for Playboy, Musician, and other publications.

The hundredth anniversary of Duke Ellington's birth, on April 29, has generated an avalanche of activity. The largest and most comprehensive effort is *The Duke Ellington Centennial Edition: The Complete RCA Victor Recordings 1927-1973*, a collection with



Forty-six years of the Duke

the advantage of both size—twenty-four compact discs—and scope. Seven discs cover the period 1927-1934, in which Ellington established his unique orchestral blends, introduced such long-term band members as the trumpeter Cootie Williams and the saxophonists Johnny Hodges and Harry Carney, and wrote a slew of classic compositions. An even larger cache of material, from

the 1940s, is highlighted by six CDs from the 1940-1942 band (including the tenor saxophonist Ben Webster and the bassist Jimmy Blanton), which is acknowledged as Ellington's greatest. The resurgent late-sixties orchestra is represented by such classic works as "The Far East Suite" and the tribute to collaborator Billy Strayhorn, "And His Mother Called Him Bill"; all three Concerts of Sacred Music, which Ellington considered his most important efforts, are included in their entirety. Although the collection contains enough failed attempts at hit records to confirm Ellington's mortality, the overall impression is of an artist with a bottomless well of melodic eloquence, orchestral nuance, and empathy for his musicians and their milieu. Claims that Ellington was both America's and the twentieth century's greatest composer can be staked on this imposing tribute.

—B.B.

DUKE'S DECADES

RIVERS KNOWN AND UNKNOWN

One lesson to be gleaned from Duke Ellington's oeuvre is that the great jazz composers benefit from extended exposure to the sound and character of particular musicians. Given the limited opportunities to perform challenging music, such longstanding working relationships are hard to sustain at the millennium's end; yet the pianist and composer Myra Melford has enjoyed the luxury of consistent personnel in the quintet she calls The Same River, Twice, and is turning that familiarity to her advantage. *Above Blue* (Arabesque), the band's second album, shows just how astute Melford has grown in deploying the mercurial inflections of Dave Douglas's trumpet, the grainy tenor-sax con-

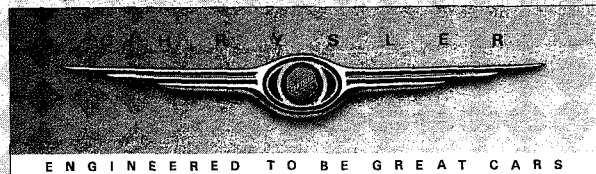


Myra Melford

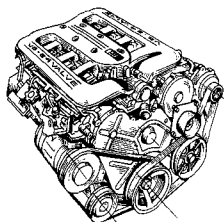
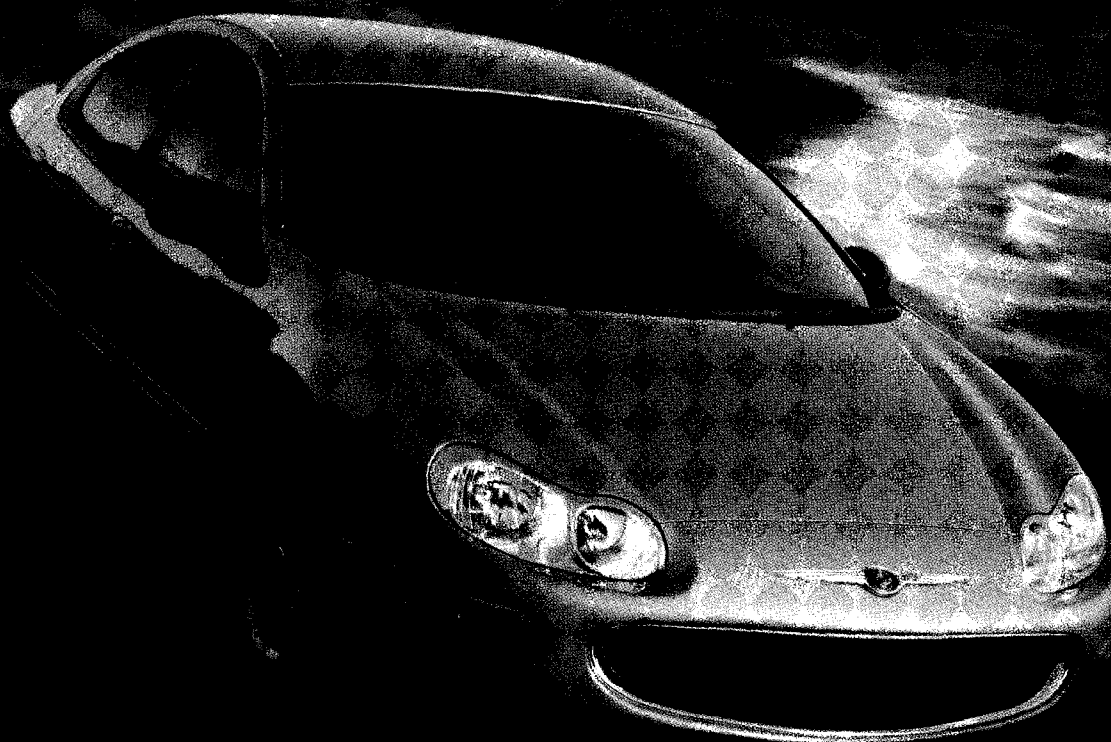
volutions and contrasting warm clarinet ruminations of Chris Speed, the darting patterns of Michael Sarin's drums, and the light-yet-grounded pulse of Erik Friedlander's cello. These ingredients plus her own complex piano work are joined in service to Melford's compositions, in which thematic trajectories are always coherent and source points can shift from late Romanticism to boogie-woogie to free-form energy. Some might call The Same River, Twice avant-garde in its structural complexities; but Melford ensures that the music sings (and dances) more than it squalls, and tempers abstract interludes with passages of sheer beauty. The results, to cite Ellington's highest accolade, are beyond category.

—B.B.

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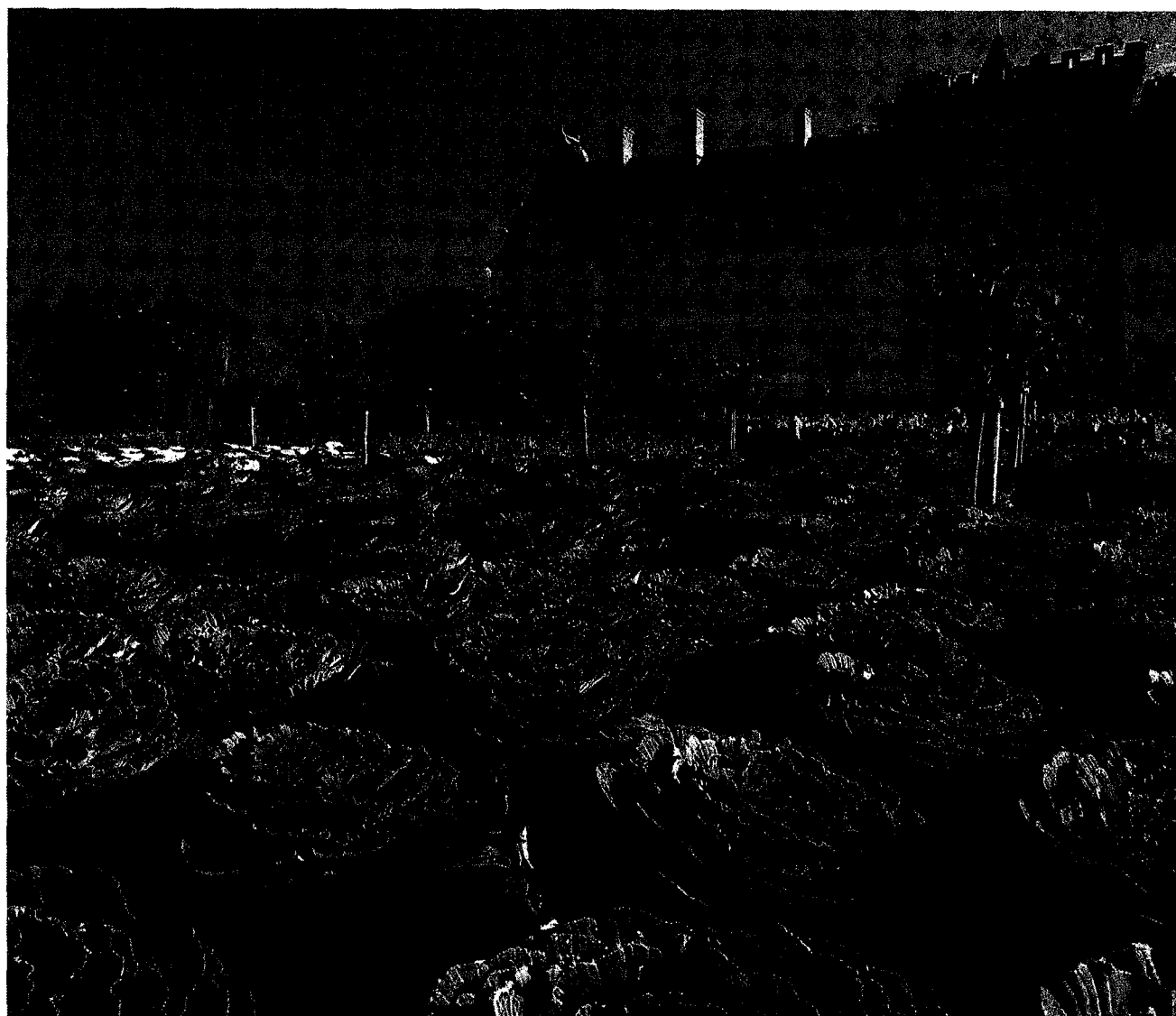
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*A pilgrimage among the potagers, or
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move freely, and absorb at your own pace? What you see is art in motion; gardens are never static.

by Hatsy Shields

We go to France, of course, with expectations of arousing the senses. Gardens can engage all five, particularly ornamental kitchen gardens, *potagers fleuris*, where simply to gaze

on a shrub heavy with pale-green ripe gooseberries is to pique the taste buds as well as delight the eye. As I prepared to make a grand tour—two tours, in fact—of French *potagers* last year, I thought of them as windows on the nation's character: on its groomed manner of living and its keen discernment of subtlety. And I was aware that kitchen gardens are much in vogue—the very place to savor French style.

To plot my route, I studied Patrick Taylor's *The Garden Lover's Guide to France*, Louisa Jones's *The Art of French Vegetable Gardening*, and a slim, indispensable brochure, titled *Parcs et Jardins*, and published by the

*Above, Château de Villandry,
in the Loire Valley*



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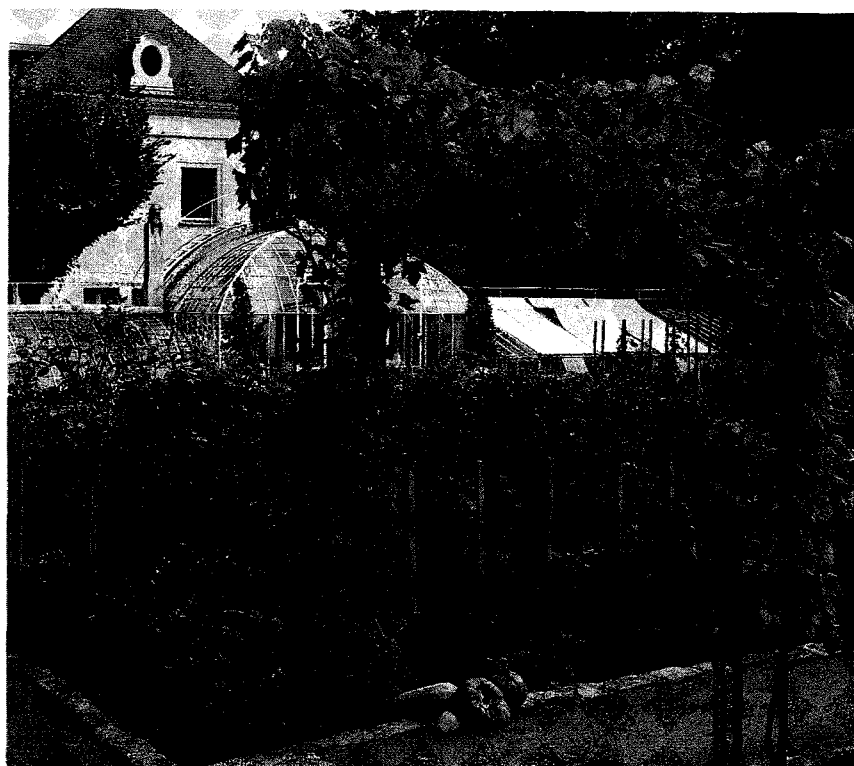
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Conseil Régional du Centre, that lists eighty-five gardens in the geographic heart of the country (available by faxing 011-33-2-38-70-31-18). The Loire Valley, in particular, beckoned with its high concentration of chateau gardens—the best known among them being the one at Villandry. In the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries French courtiers built their chateaux along the river's flat, fertile banks—turreted castles with walled *potagers*. Many of the chateaux are open to the public today, in order that their owners can qualify for tax breaks and government grants.

The *potagers* I visited—more than a dozen—were by turns stunningly beautiful, shamelessly ostentatious (420 varieties of tomatoes—really!), roadside humble, and reassuringly practical. My itinerary, begun on one trip and completed on the other, swung counterclockwise from the Ile de France south and east through the Loire Valley and back, dipping down into Poitou. But a garden pilgrim could as easily take a train out of Paris to, say, Tours, and rent a car for day trips. I set off with Cary, a fellow gardener, for a week in early summer, and returned in October during the fall harvest with my husband, Bill—not someone, as it happens, who instinctively caresses rosemary.

As Cary and I drove southwest from Paris through the Ile de France, we wondered aloud if the French would allow their *courgettes* to romp unrestrained or their strawberries to invade the *haricots verts*. Or would every plot be pollarded and pinched into chic obedience? Our first stop was Château de Saint-Jean de Beauregard, near Les Ulis, whose revered owner, Muriel de Curel, began her ambitious restoration of the chateau's 300-year-old walled *potager* in 1985. Now every fall she holds an internationally popular harvest festival celebrating old-fashioned varieties of vegetables.

While Cary seated herself among the bees in a flowering rose arbor, I stalked a visiting school group. Under instructions from the long-sweatered garden *directrice* to listen well, the flock of five-year-olds squatted at the edges of beds flaunting red-stemmed Swiss chard, feathery bronze fennel, and silver-blue heads of cabbage. “*Et voilà, mes en-*



PHOTOS THIS PAGE: LE SCANIFF-MAYER

Jean Bardet's *potager*; below, Château de Saint-Jean de Beauregard

fants, what do you suppose this is?” she asked, tugging a root from the earth. “*Une carotte, une carotte*,” they chanted—except for the three who were intently cornering a frog.

A round, moss-encrusted pool creates the centerpiece of the five-acre garden, which is laid out in four squares that are divided again into four and then sliced into tidy, colorful rows. Water, piped in from outside, is warmed by the sun in great iron cauldrons before being distrib-



uted to the plants, so as not to startle them. Tendrils of grapevines were escaping from vents in old greenhouses where, under glass, pebble-sized fruit already clustered. The *fruitier*, a winter storage shed for apples and pears, slumped poetically against ancient stone walls in a corner. By faithfully reproduc-

ing a traditional, highly ordered plan and planting “heirloom” varieties of fruits and vegetables, De Curel honors history. Her dedication to education is palpable.

Less didactic is La Massonnière, a beguiling but rarely visited garden southwest of Le Mans, in the village of Saint-Christophe en Champagne. Designed by a twentieth-century artist, Pierre Kendal Bushe, in an enclosure erected by a seventeenth-century musketeer, the *potager* at La Massonnière cheerfully integrates a profusion of blooms—red roses, spires of delphinium, bursts of white cleome—with vigorous vegetables and fruit trees. As I stood admiring ranks of tomatoes underplanted with cushions of fleshy green lettuce and battalions of miniature yellow snapdragons, a tiny brown bird flew into a boxwood lollipop at my elbow. Immediately a chorus of “Feed me first” burst from the nest hidden inside the whimsical topiary. Every detail, like the ribbons of pink begonias that bordered the strips of lawn edging the stone paths, strengthened the ornamental appeal of the garden. This *potager* exists simply to enchant its viewers.

Besides the romantically decorative, we were eager to visit the seriously epicurean—gardens of famous chefs. Im-

pelled by the sober duty of supplying restaurant kitchens, chefs' *potagers* are almost invariably utilitarian in design. A good example is the gracious estate Domaine des Hauts de Loire, in Onzain between Blois and Tours, where the restaurant and hotel have earned the Relais & Châteaux imprimatur. In the morning we watched the shy, weathered gardener weed unpretentious crops of onions, parsley, blue bachelor buttons, and orange nasturtiums. At noon the talented young chef, Giraud Rémy, tucked nasturtium leaves under stuffed eel and flowers atop mounds of fresh fava beans. Here the *potager's* sole mission is to serve the chef's art.

A few miles down the river, in Tours, chef Jean Bardet's *potager*, however, is an extravagant showpiece in itself, and dinner guests are invited to wander among rows of exotic vegetables such as eggplants that taste like melon and thumbnail-sized golden tomatoes that explode in the mouth. We were impressed by the endless variety of herbs—I suppose a great chef might need seventeen different kinds of basil. But when we sat down to a meal at Bardet's eponymous, Michelin-two-star restaurant, we found ourselves wondering if the chef's culinary elaborations weren't just too tricky. Nibbling at an elegant little bundle of matchsticks, Cary said, "Delicious, but whatever is it?"

HONEST, working kitchen gardens can be enormously appealing. I was struck to see that these are often aristocrats' labors of love. Still north of the Loire, leap forward three months and slide Bill into the driver's seat. The Count and Countess de Saint Venant were expecting us at their Château de Valmer, in Vouvray, a seventeenth-century, 200-acre property of Italianate terraces, moats that are now awash with flowers, walled *potager*, and sloping vineyards.

From heights overlooking a surprisingly *petit* chateau, Alix de Saint Venant, who is a respected landscape designer as well as a countess, explained to a group of ten visitors that the original castle burned to the ground in 1948, owing to an ironing mishap. Lawns and hedges now obscure the old foundations, but the original stone landscaping still dominates the site—with yards and

yards of lichen-covered balustrades, elegant double staircases, graceful fountains, and ancient spiral steps winding down into the moat. The distant view takes in ploughed fields and buttery-yellow poplar woods.

As we descended into the *potager*, I could see this was indeed a true working garden. "We eat from our garden," Alix said with a shrug. Someone had been interrupted at his harvesting jobs, leaving a half-full basket of beans at the end of a row and a ladder for picking fruit against a wall where apricot and plum trees were pruned into perfect fans. In the greenhouse Alix snipped bunches of grapes for each of us, and we (even Bill) rubbed our fingers on new cuttings of geraniums, releasing the fragrance of rose and nutmeg. Crowds of pink asters lolled against the cardoons, spiky five-foot plants with exuberant gray-green foliage. The edible stems had been wrapped in cardboard to blanch them, for tenderness.

Aymard de Saint Venant, recently retired from banking in Paris, demonstrated the chateau's wine-making operation. We peered into wagons of grapes before they were tipped into the presses. We sipped the unfermented juice on its way to glass-lined vats. Our host ushered us through dank caves stacked with racks of dusty bottles, disturbed only by regular quarter turns to dislodge sediment.

Bill and I stayed for an impromptu lunch in the kitchen of sausage, cheeses, pickles, and salad. The pears, Beurre Hardy, were at their sweetest. It was a job to keep the juice from running down my chin.

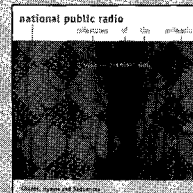
In La Bussière, where the Loire loops west, Geneviève de Chasseval, too, has honored the family heritage by revamping the *potager* at her husband's ancestral Château des Pêcheurs. She began in 1992 with the help of the well-regarded landscape architect Pierre Joyaux. The friendly, gentle countess, long a widow, explained to me that her children, who are now full-grown, create new geometric patterns for the four acres of vegetable beds every year; planting observes the rules of crop rotation and incorporates every speck of manure from the town's last remaining dairy farm. When we praised the dewdrop-bejeweled cabbages in shades of purple to

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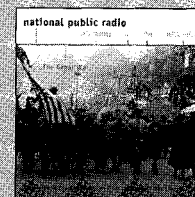
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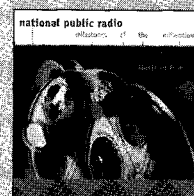
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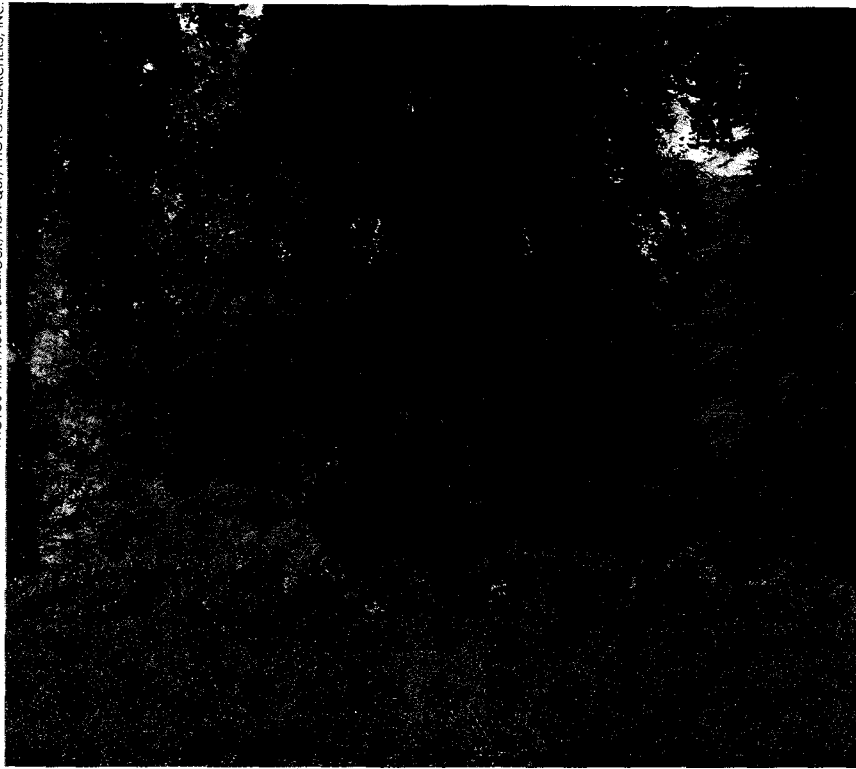
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La Massonnière and, below, the Potager du Roi

blue, she sighed. "Our daily diet during the war," she said.

As we wandered along beds tangled with Turk's-cap pumpkins and white pattypan squash, I noticed that the heavy glass cloches used to protect tender melons on chilly nights were of multiple pieces glued together. I asked the countess if she knew that factory-made cloches are now available at garden centers. "Oh, yes," she answered, "but these were my grandmother's."

In the Thouet Valley, north of Poitiers, yet another passionate restoration project consumes the heart and soul and the apparently considerable financial resources of Count Charles-Henri de Bartillat. A forty-eight-year-old retired lawyer who fell in love at first sight with Château de Saint-Loup and its pure seventeenth-century architecture, De Bartillat told us, "I was mad—*complètement fou*." Eight years ago he bought, from a pop star, the badly neglected 120-acre property, including a medieval tower (where guests can now stay in canopied beds for upwards of \$125 a night) and an orangerie (available for parties and wedding receptions).

When we arrived, the chateau was outlined against a pale-pink evening sky. A mother and daughter who had been selling gourds under a small tent at the

edge of the moat showed us to our room in the keep and then promptly disappeared into the village, locking the heavy iron gate as they went. The count would be in later that evening, we were to understand. Alone, with the magnificent chateau as backdrop, we strolled the *potager*, the orchards, and the fields beyond. The tunnel of maples bordering a long canal became so dark that we couldn't make out what was swimming—extraordinarily large rats, we discovered the next day.



Stretching out behind and below the chateau, the five-acre sunken *potager* contains enormous squares of vegetables. Using detailed plans of the estate that date from 1745, ancient vegetable varieties, and old espalier patterns, De Bartillat is restoring the garden and

orchards. In the previous year he had planted 320 fruit and nut trees. Figs, white-fleshed peaches, and pomegranates were ripening in a courtyard in the shadow of a 400-year-old pigeon tower in need of repairs.

The next morning we met the count and talked with him—or, really, he talked and we listened. "Why do I give myself to Saint-Loup?" he said, raking his fingers through his hair. "For the love of France." There was no doubt that the count oversees every detail, roof tiles to flower pots, in the rebirth of his spooky and wonderful fairy-tale castle.

No *potager* pilgrimage would be complete without a stop at the Potager du Roi, the magnificent vegetable and fruit garden commissioned by Louis XIV to accompany the park that Le Nôtre designed for him at Versailles. When the yawning runways of Versailles become tedious, cross the street to the enormous gates opening onto the twenty-two-acre *potager*, a school of agriculture since the 1870s. Espaliered trees, with trunks that look like elephants' feet, line paths that precisely intersect fertile vegetable beds. In the Sun King's day, the late 1600s, his garden director, Jean-Baptiste La Quintinie, insisted that fifty varieties of pears be grown. Today forty-nine continue to be cultivated—the trees sculpted, of course, into rigidly artificial postures.

On the rainy October afternoon we visited, tasting stations in tents offered freshly harvested fruits and vegetables of the ages. In a far corner of the property, in a makeshift bistro fashioned out of sailcloth, next to caves full of drying racks and ripening fruit, a horticulture student stirred the soup du jour, seventeenth-century pumpkin, in a steaming vat.

The French do insist, it seems, that their plant life be well behaved. Tidiness is mandatory, orderliness essential. But oh, how supreme are the requirements for the table! Even if too fragile to be shipped, too delicate to withstand being displayed in the market, too susceptible to disease to be grown commercially, a variety of, for instance, radish will be esteemed for its uniqueness, whether that has to do with shade of pink or degree of crunch. Just step into the garden to experience, and relish, the Gallic appreciation of nuance. ☘

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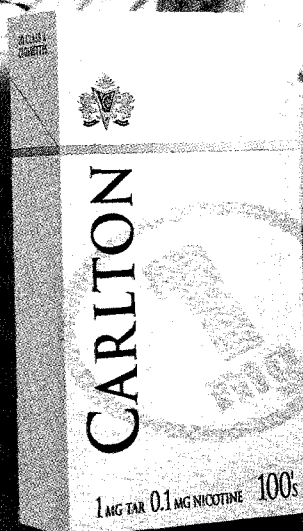
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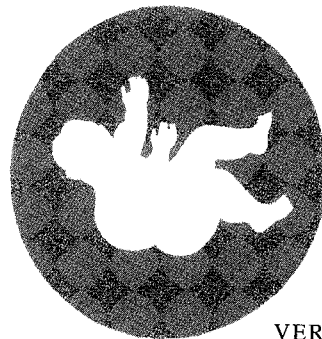
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THE GREAT DISRUPTION

HUMAN NATURE AND THE RECONSTITUTION OF SOCIAL ORDER

by FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

The shift to the information age has been accompanied by social disorder throughout the industrialized world. But new forms of stability may already be in the making



VER the past half century the United States and other economically advanced countries have made the shift into what has been called an information society, the information age, or the post-industrial era. The futurist Alvin Toffler has labeled this transition the “Third Wave,” suggesting that it will ultimately be as consequential as the two previous waves in human history: from hunter-gatherer to agricultural societies, and from agricultural to industrial ones.

A society built around information tends to produce more of the two things people value most in a modern democracy—freedom and equality. Freedom of choice has exploded, in everything from cable channels to low-cost shopping outlets to friends met on the Internet. Hierarchies of all sorts, political and corporate, have come under pressure and begun to crumble.

People associate the information age with the advent of the Internet, in the 1990s, but the shift from the industrial era started more than a generation earlier, with the deindustrialization of the Rust Belt in the United States and comparable movements away from manufacturing in other industrialized

countries. This period, roughly the mid-1960s to the early 1990s, was also marked by seriously deteriorating social conditions in most of the industrialized world. Crime and social disorder began to rise, making inner-city areas of the wealthiest societies on earth almost uninhabitable. The decline of kinship as a social institution, which has been going on for more than 200 years, accelerated sharply in the second half of the twentieth century. Marriages and births declined and divorce soared; and one out of every three children in the United States and more than half of all children in Scandinavia were born out of wedlock. Finally, trust and confidence in institutions went into a forty-year decline. Although

a majority of people in the United States and Europe expressed confidence in their governments and fellow citizens during the late 1950s, only a small minority did so by the early 1990s. The nature of people's involvement with one another changed as well—although there is no evidence that people associated with one another less, their ties tended to be less permanent, looser, and with smaller groups of people.

These changes were dramatic; they occurred over a wide range of similar countries; and they all appeared at roughly the same period in history. As such, they constituted a Great Disruption in the social values that had prevailed in the industrial-age society of the mid twentieth century. It is very unusual for social indicators to move together so rapidly; even without knowing why they did so, we have cause to suspect that the reasons might be related. Although William J. Bennett and other conservatives are often attacked for harping on the theme of moral decline, they are essentially correct: the perceived breakdown of social order is not a matter of nostalgia, poor memory, or ignorance about the hypocrisies of earlier ages. The decline is readily measurable in statistics on crime, fatherless children, broken trust, reduced opportunities for and outcomes from education, and the like.

Was it simply an accident that these negative social trends, which together reflect a weakening of social bonds and common values in Western societies, occurred just as the economies of those societies were making the transition from the industrial to the information era? The hypothesis of this article is that the two were in fact intimately connected, and that although many blessings have flowed from a more complex, information-based economy, certain bad things also happened to our social and moral life. The connections were technological, economic, and cultural. The changing nature of work tended to substitute mental for physical labor, propelling millions of women into the workplace and undermining the traditional understandings on which the family had been based. Innovations in medical technology leading to the birth-control pill and increasing longevity diminished the role of reproduction and family in people's lives. And the culture of individualism, which in the laboratory and the marketplace leads to innovation and growth, spilled over into the realm of social norms, where it corroded virtually all forms of authority and weakened the bonds holding families, neighborhoods, and nations together. The complete story is, of course, much more complex than this, and differs from one country to another. But broadly speaking, the technological change that brought about what the economist Joseph Schumpeter called "creative destruction" in the marketplace caused similar disruption in the world of social relationships. Indeed, it would be surprising if this were not true.

But there is a bright side, too: social order, once disrupted, tends to get remade, and there are many indications that this is happening today. We can expect a new social order for a simple reason: human beings are *by nature* social creatures,

whose most basic drives and instincts lead them to create moral rules that bind them together into communities. They are also by nature rational, and their rationality allows them to spontaneously create ways of cooperating with one another. Religion, though often helpful to this process, is not the *sine qua non* of social order, as many conservatives believe. Neither is a strong and expansive state, as many on the left argue. Man's natural condition is not the war of "every man against every man" envisioned by Thomas Hobbes but rather a civil society made orderly by the presence of a host of moral rules. These assertions, moreover, are empirically supported by a tremendous amount of research coming out of the life sciences in recent years, in fields as diverse as neurophysiology, behavioral genetics, evolutionary biology, ethology, and biologically informed approaches to psychology and anthropology. The study of how order arises—not as the result of a top-down mandate by hierarchical authority, whether political or religious, but as the result of self-organization on the part of decentralized individuals—is one of the most interesting and important intellectual developments of our time.

The idea that social order has to come from a centralized, rational, bureaucratic hierarchy was very much associated with the industrial age. The sociologist Max Weber, observing nineteenth-century industrial society, argued that rational bureaucracy was, in fact, the very essence of modern life. We know now, however, that in an information society neither governments nor corporations will rely exclusively on formal bureaucratic rules to organize people. Instead they will decentralize and devolve power, and rely on the people over whom they have nominal authority to be *self-organizing*. The precondition for such self-organization is internalized rules and norms of behavior, a fact that suggests that the world of the twenty-first century will depend heavily on such informal norms. Thus although the transition into an information society has disrupted social norms, a modern, high-tech society cannot get along without them and will face considerable incentives to produce them.

THE disruption of social order by the progress of technology is not a new phenomenon. Particularly since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, human societies have been subject to a relentless process of modernization, as one new production process replaced another. The social disorder of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in America and Britain can be traced directly to the disruptive effects of the so-called first Industrial Revolution, when steam power and mechanization created new industries in textiles, railroads, and the like. Agricultural societies were transformed into urban industrial societies within the space of perhaps a hundred years, and all the accumulated social norms, habits, and customs that had characterized rural or village life were replaced by the rhythms of the factory and the city.



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This shift in norms engendered what is perhaps the most famous concept in modern sociology—the distinction drawn by Ferdinand Tönnies between what he called *Gemeinschaft* (“community”) and *Gesellschaft* (“society”). According to Tönnies, the *Gemeinschaft* that characterized a typical pre-modern European peasant society consisted of a dense network of personal relationships based heavily on kinship and on the direct, face-to-face contact that occurs in a small,

closed village. Norms were largely unwritten, and individuals were bound to one another in a web of mutual interdependence that touched all aspects of life, from family to work to the few leisure activities that such societies enjoyed. *Gesellschaft*, on the other hand, was the framework of laws and other formal regulations that characterized large, urban industrial societies. Social relationships were more formalized and impersonal; individuals did not depend on one an-

other for support to nearly the same extent, and were therefore much less morally obligated to one another.

Many of the standard sociological texts written in the middle of the twentieth century treated the shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* as if it were a one-shot affair: societies were either “traditional” or “modern,” and the modern ones somehow constituted the end of the road for social development. But social evolution did not culminate in middle-class American society of the 1950s; industrial societies soon began transforming themselves into what the sociologist Daniel Bell has characterized as post-industrial societies, or what we know as information societies. If this transformation is as momentous as the previous one, we should hardly be surprised that the impact on social values has proved equally great.

Whether information-age democracies can maintain social order in the face of technological and economic change is among their greatest challenges today. From the early 1970s to the early 1990s there was a sudden surge of new democracies in Latin America, Europe, Asia, and the former Communist world. As I argued in *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), there is a strong logic behind the evolution of political institutions in the direction of modern liberal democracy, based on the correlation between economic development and stable democracy. Political and economic institutions have converged over time in the world's most economically advanced countries, and there are no obvious alternatives to the ones we see before us.

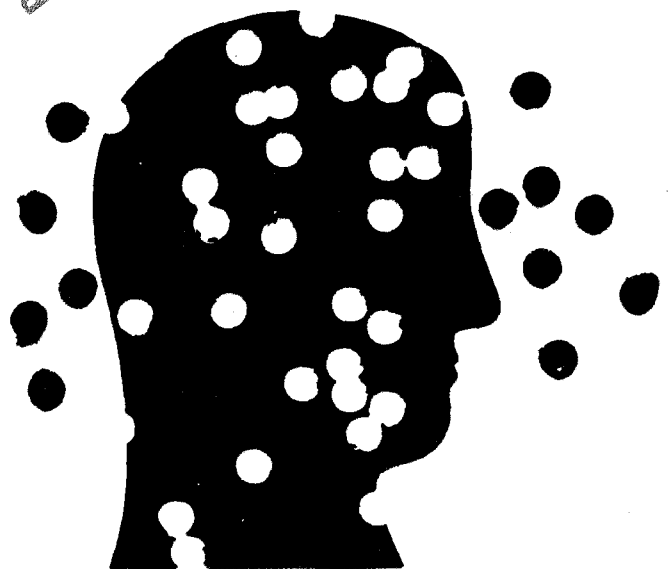
This progressive tendency is not necessarily evident in moral and social development, however. The tendency of contemporary liberal democracies to fall prey to excessive individualism is perhaps their greatest long-term vulnerability, and is particularly visible in the most individualistic of all democracies, the United States. The modern liberal state was premised on the notion that in the interests of political peace, government would not take sides among the differing moral claims made by religion and traditional culture. Church and State were to be kept separate; there would be pluralism in opinions about the most important moral and ethical questions, concerning ultimate ends or the nature of the good. Tolerance would become the cardinal virtue; in place of moral consensus would be a transparent framework of law and institutions that produced political order. Such a political system did not require that people be particularly

virtuous; they need only be rational and follow the law in their own self-interest. Similarly, the market-based capitalist economic system that went hand in glove with political liberalism required only that people consult their long-term self-interest to achieve a socially optimal production and distribution of goods.

The societies created on these individualistic premises have worked extraordinarily well, and as the twentieth century comes to a close, there are few real alternatives to liberal democracy and market capitalism as fundamental organizing principles for modern societies. Individual self-interest is a lower but more stable ground than virtue on which to base society. The creation of a rule of law is among the proudest accomplishments of Western civilization—and its benefits become all too obvious when one deals with countries that lack one, such as Russia and China.

But although formal law and strong political and economic institutions are critical, they are not in themselves sufficient to guarantee a successful modern society. To work properly, liberal democracy has always been dependent on certain shared cultural values. This can be seen most clearly in the contrast between the United States and the countries of Latin America. When Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and other Latin American countries got their independence, in the nineteenth century, many of them established formal democratic constitutions and legal systems patterned on the presidential system of the United States. Since then not one Latin American country has experienced the political stability, economic growth, or in-

the crucial question about the Great Disruption is not whether it had cultural roots, but how we can explain the timing and speed of the transformation.



stitutional efficacy enjoyed by the United States, though most, fortunately, had returned to democratic government by the end of the 1980s.

There are many complex historical reasons for this, but the most important is a cultural one: the United States was settled primarily by British people and inherited not just British law but British culture as well, whereas Latin America inherited various cultural traditions from the Iberian peninsula. Although the U.S. Constitution enforces a separation between Church and State, American culture was decisively shaped in its formative years by sectarian Protestantism. Sectarian Protestantism reinforced both American individualism and the tendency of the society to be self-organizing in a myriad of voluntary associations and communities. The vitality of American civil society was crucial both for the stability of the country's democratic institutions and for its vibrant economy. The imperial and Latin Catholic traditions of Spain and Portugal, in contrast, reinforced dependence on large, centralized institutions like the State and the Church, weakening an independent civil society. Similarly, the differing abilities of Northern and Southern Europe to make modern institutions work were influenced by religious heritage and cultural tradition.

The problem with most modern liberal democracies is that they cannot take their cultural preconditions for granted. The most successful among them, including the United States, were lucky to have married strong formal institutions to a flexible and supportive informal culture. But nothing in the formal institutions themselves guarantees that the society in which they exist will continue to enjoy the right sort of cultural values and norms under the pressures of technological, economic, and social change. Just the opposite: the individualism, pluralism, and tolerance that are built into the formal institutions tend to encourage cultural diversity, and therefore have the potential to undermine moral values inherited from the past. And a dynamic, technologically innovative economy will by its very nature disrupt existing social relations.

It may be, then, that although large political and economic institutions have long been evolving along a secular path, social life is more cyclical. Social norms that work for one historical period are disrupted by the advances of technology and the economy, and society has to play catch-up in order to establish new norms.

SINCE the 1960s the West has experienced a series of liberation movements that have sought to free individuals from the constraints of traditional social norms and moral rules. The sexual revolution, the feminist movement, and the 1980s and 1990s movements in favor of gay and lesbian rights have exploded through the Western world. The liberation sought by each of these movements has concerned social rules, norms, and laws that unduly restricted the options

and opportunities of individuals—whether they were young people choosing sexual partners, women seeking career opportunities, or gays seeking recognition of their rights. Pop psychology, from the human-potential movement of the 1960s to the self-esteem trend of the 1980s, sought to free individuals from stifling social expectations.

Both the left and the right participated in the effort to free the individual from restrictive rules, but their points of emphasis tended to be different. To put it simply, the left worried about lifestyles and the right worried about money. The left did not want traditional values to unduly constrain women, minorities, gays, the homeless, people accused of crimes, or any number of other groups marginalized by society. The right, on the other hand, did not want communities putting constraints on what people could do with their property—or, in the United States, what they could do with their guns. Left and right each denounced excessive individualism on the part of the other: those who supported reproductive choice tended to oppose choice in buying guns or gas-guzzling cars; those who wanted unlimited consumer choice were appalled when the restraints on criminals were loosened. But neither was willing to give up its preferred sphere of free choice for the sake of constraining the other.

As people soon discovered, there are serious problems with a culture of unbridled individualism, in which the breaking of rules becomes, in a sense, the only remaining rule. The first has to do with the fact that moral values and social rules are not simply arbitrary constraints on individual choice but the precondition for any kind of cooperative enterprise. Indeed, social scientists have recently begun to refer to a society's stock of shared values as "social capital." Like physical capital (land, buildings, machines) and human capital (the skills and knowledge we carry around in our heads), social capital produces wealth and is therefore of economic value to a national economy. But it is also the prerequisite for all forms of group endeavor that take place in a modern society, from running a corner grocery store to lobbying Congress to raising children. Individuals amplify their own power and abilities by following cooperative rules that constrain their freedom of choice, because these also allow them to communicate with others and to coordinate their actions. Social virtues such as honesty, reciprocity, and the keeping of commitments are not worthwhile just as ethical values; they also have a tangible dollar value and help the groups that practice them to achieve shared ends.

The second problem with a culture of individualism is that it ends up being bereft of community. A community is not formed every time a group of people happen to interact with one another; true communities are bound together by the values, norms, and experiences their members share. The deeper and more strongly held those common values, the stronger the sense of community. The trade-off between personal freedom and community, however, does not seem obvious or

necessary to many. As people have been liberated from their traditional ties to spouses, families, neighborhoods, workplaces, and churches, they have expected to retain social connectedness. But they have begun to realize that their elective affinities, which they can slide into and out of at will, have left them feeling lonely and disoriented, longing for deeper and more permanent relationships.

A society dedicated to the constant upending of norms and rules in the name of expanding individual freedom of choice will find itself increasingly disorganized, atomized, isolated, and incapable of carrying out common goals and tasks. The same society that wants no limits on its technological innovation also sees no limits on many forms of personal behavior, and the consequence is a rise in crime, broken families, parents' failure to fulfill obligations to children, neighbors' refusal to take responsibility for one another, and citizens' opting out of public life.

WHAT HAPPENED

BEGINNING in about 1965 a large number of indicators that can serve as negative measures of social capital all started moving upward rapidly at the same time. These could be put under three broad headings: crime, family, and trust.

Americans are aware that crime rates began sometime in the 1960s to climb very rapidly—a dramatic change from the early post-Second World War period, when U.S. murder and robbery rates actually declined. After declining slightly in the mid-1980s, crime rates spurted upward again in the late 1980s and peaked around 1991–1992. The rates for both violent and property crimes have dropped substantially since then. Indeed, they have fallen most dramatically in the areas where they had risen most rapidly—that is, in big cities like New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Los Angeles.

Although the United States is exceptional among developed countries for its high crime rates, crime rose significantly in virtually all other non-Asian developed countries in approximately the same time period. Violent crime rose rapidly in Canada, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. With regard to crimes against property, a broader measure of disorder, the *United States is no longer exceptional: Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Sweden have ended up with theft rates higher than those in the United States over the past generation.*

Of the shifts in social norms that constitute the Great Disruption, some of the most dramatic concern those related to reproduction, the family, and relations between the sexes. Divorce rates moved up sharply across the developed world (except in Italy, where divorce was illegal until 1970, and other Catholic countries); by the 1980s half of all American marriages could be expected to end in divorce, and the ratio

of divorced to married people had increased fourfold in just thirty years. Births to unmarried women as a proportion of U.S. live births climbed from under five percent to 32 percent from 1940 to 1995. The figure was close to 60 percent in many Scandinavian countries; the United Kingdom, Canada, and France reached levels comparable to that in the United States. The combined probabilities of single-parent births, divorce, and the dissolution of cohabiting relationships between parents (a situation common in Europe) meant that in most developed countries ever smaller minorities of children would reach the age of eighteen with both parents remaining in the household. The core reproductive function of the family was threatened as well: fertility has dropped so dramatically in Italy, Spain, and Germany that they stand to lose up to 30 percent of their populations each generation, absent new net immigration.

Finally, anyone who has lived through the 1950s to the 1990s in the United States or another Western country can scarcely fail to recognize the widespread changes in values that have taken place over this period in the direction of increasing individualism. Survey data, along with common-sense observation, indicate that people are much less likely to defer to the authority of an ever-broader range of social institutions. Trust in institutions has consequently decreased markedly. In 1958, 73 percent of Americans surveyed said they trusted the federal government to do what is right either “most of the time” or “just about always”; by 1994 the figure had fallen as low as 15 percent. Europeans, although less anti-statist than Americans, have nonetheless seen similar declines in confidence in such traditional institutions as the Church, the police, and government. Americans trust one another less as well: although 10 percent more Americans evinced more trust than distrust in surveys done in the early 1960s, by the 1990s the distrusters had an almost 30 percent margin over those expressing trust. It is not clear that either the number of groups or group memberships in civil society declined overall in this period, as the political scientist Robert Putnam has suggested. What is clear, however, is that what I call the radius of trust has declined, and social ties have become less binding and long-lasting. (Readers can obtain more detailed statistical information on the Great Disruption at <http://mason.gmu.edu/~ffukuyam/>.)

SOME PROPOSED CAUSES OF THE DISRUPTION

CHANGES as great as these will defy attempts to provide simple explanations. However, the fact that many different social indicators moved across a wide group of industrialized countries at roughly the same time simplifies the analytical task somewhat by pointing us toward a more general level of explanation. When the same phenomena occur in a broad range of countries, we can rule out expla-

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nations specific to a single country, such as the effects of the Vietnam War or of Watergate.

Several arguments have been put forward to explain why the phenomena we associate with the Great Disruption occurred. Here are three: They were brought on by increasing poverty and income inequality. They were products of the modern welfare state. They were the result of a broad cultural shift that included the decline of religion and the promotion of individualistic self-gratification over community obligation.

The Great Disruption was caused by poverty and inequality. The idea that such large changes in social norms could be brought on by economic deprivation in countries that are wealthier than any others in human history might give one pause. Poor people in the United States have higher absolute standards of living than many Americans of past generations, and more per capita wealth than many people in contemporary Third World countries with more-intact family structures. Poverty rates, after coming down dramatically through the 1960s and rebounding slightly thereafter, have not increased in a way that would explain a huge increase in social disorder.

Those favoring the economic hypothesis argue, of course, that it is not absolute levels of poverty that are the source of the problem: modern societies, despite being richer overall, have become more unequal, or else have experienced economic turbulence and job loss that have led to social dysfunction. A casual glance at the comparative data on divorce and illegitimacy rates shows that this correlation

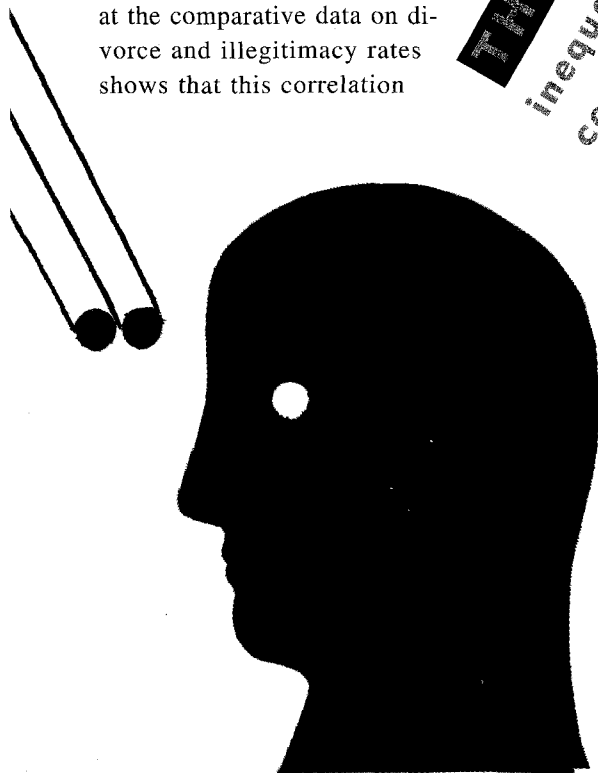
cannot possibly be true in the case of family breakdown. If one looks across the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, there is no positive correlation between the level of welfare benefits aimed at increasing economic equality and stable families. Indeed, there is a weak positive correlation between high levels of welfare benefits and illegitimacy, tending to support the argument advanced by American conservatives that the welfare state is the cause of and not the cure for family breakdown. The highest rates of illegitimacy are found in Sweden and Denmark, egalitarian countries that cycle upwards of 50 percent of their gross domestic product through the state. The United States cycles less than 30 percent of GDP through the government and has higher levels of inequality, yet it has lower rates of illegitimacy. Japan and Korea, which have minimal welfare-state protections for poor people, also have two of the lowest rates of divorce and illegitimacy in the OECD.

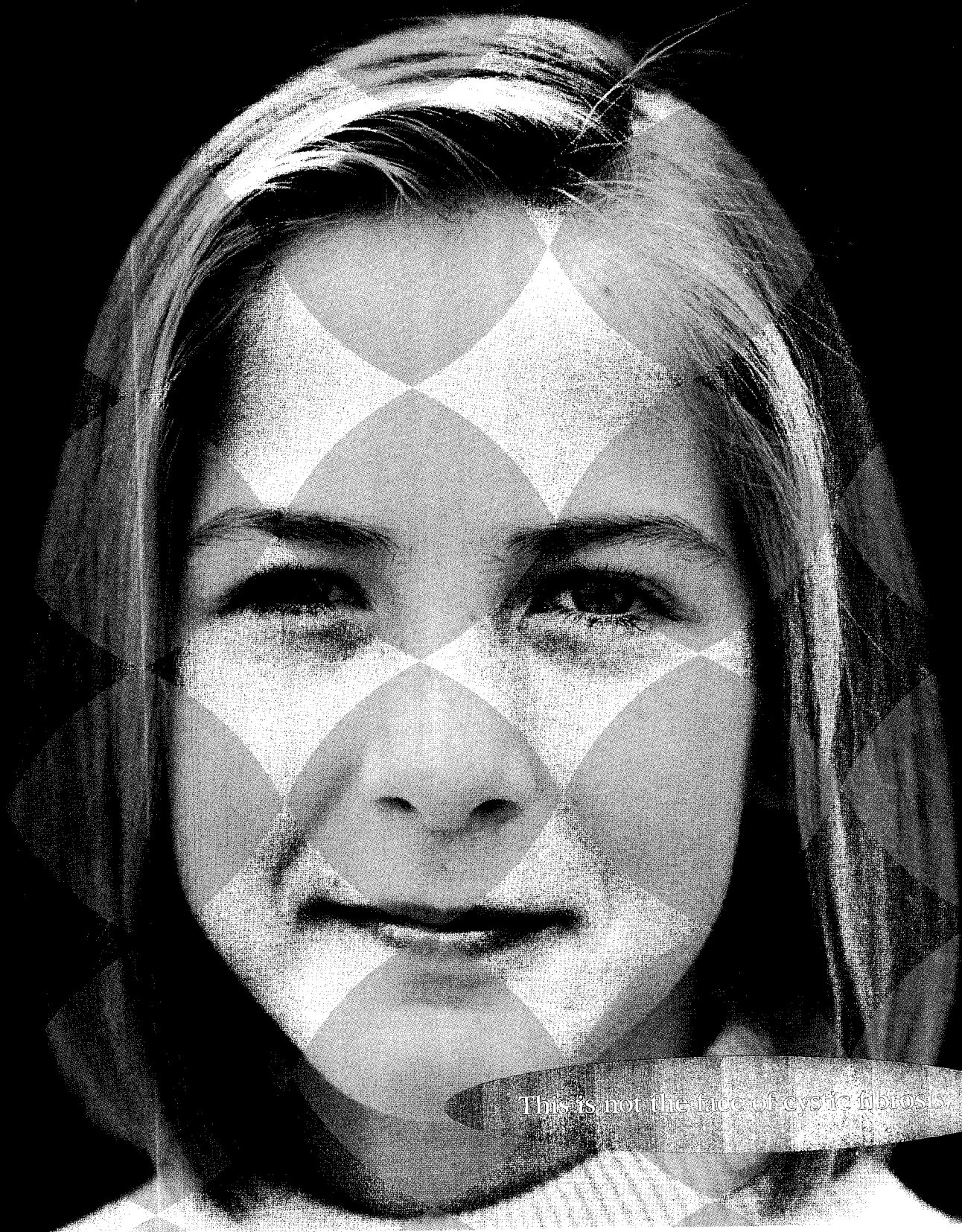
The notion that poverty and inequality beget crime is a commonplace among politicians and voters in democratic societies who seek reasons for justifying welfare and poverty programs.

But although there is plenty of evidence of a broad correlation between income inequality and crime, this hardly constitutes a plausible explanation for rapidly rising crime rates in the West. There was no depression in the period from the 1960s to the 1990s to explain the sudden rise in crime; in fact, the great American postwar crime wave began in a period of full employment and general prosperity. (Indeed, the Great Depression of the 1930s saw *decreasing* levels of violent crime in the United States.) Income inequality rose in the United States during the Great Disruption, but crime has also risen in Western developed countries that have remained more egalitarian than the United States. America's greater economic inequality may to some degree explain why its crime rates are higher than, say, Sweden's in any given year, but it does not explain why Swedish rates began to rise in the same period that America's did. Income inequality, moreover, has continued to increase in the United States in the 1990s, while crime rates have fallen; hence the correlation between inequality and crime becomes negative for this period.

The Great Disruption was caused by mistaken government policies. The second general explanation for the increase in social disorder is one made by conservatives; it has been primarily associated with Charles Mur-

THE notion that poverty and inequality beget crime is a commonplace among politicians and voters who seek reasons for justifying welfare and poverty programs.



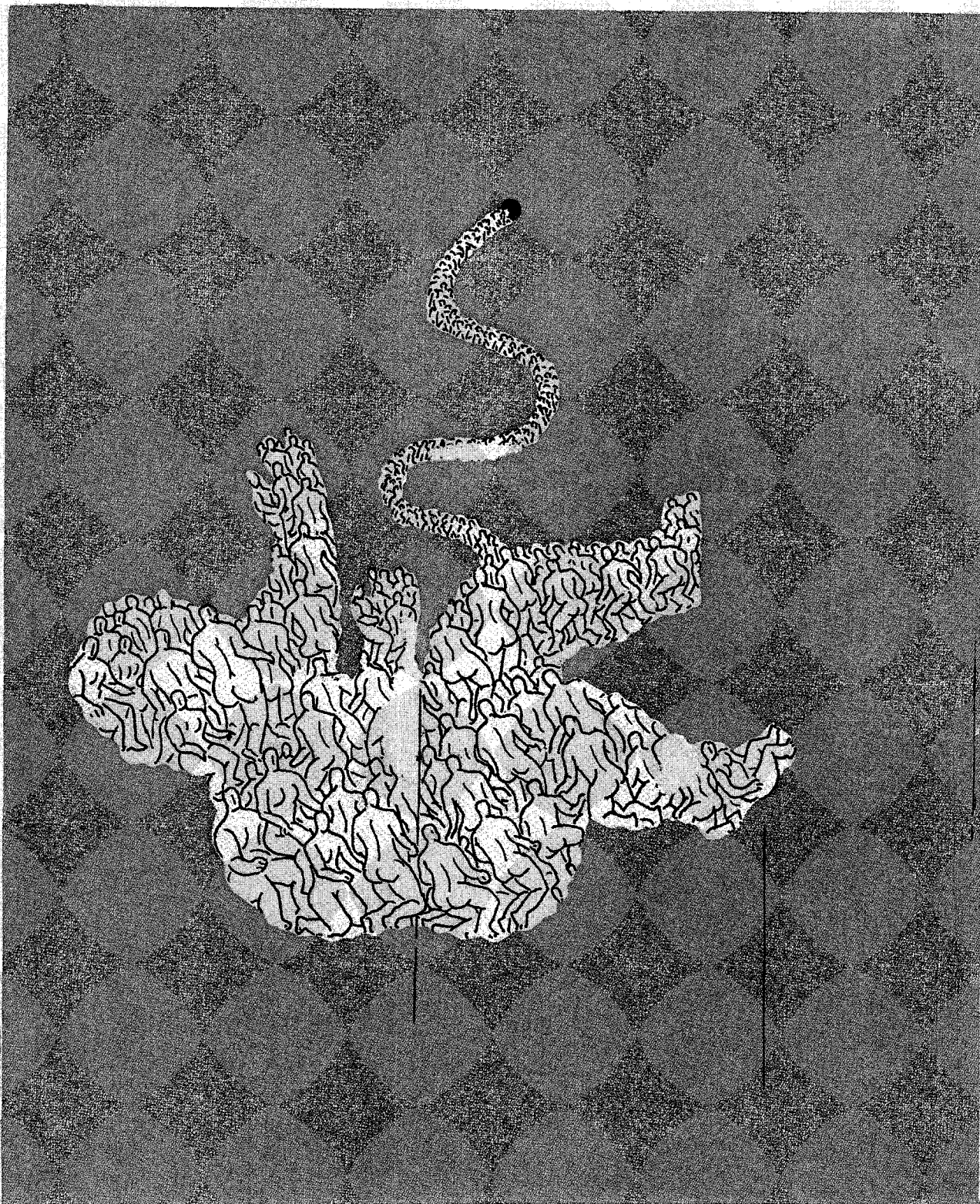


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ray's book *Losing Ground*, and before that with the economist Gary Becker. The argument is the mirror image of the left's: it maintains that the perverse incentives created by the welfare state itself explain the rise in family breakdown and crime. The primary American welfare program targeted at poor women, the Depression-era Aid to Families with Dependent Children, provided welfare payments only to single mothers, and thereby penalized women who married the fa-

thers of their children. The United States abolished AFDC in the welfare-reform act of 1996, in part because of arguments concerning its perverse incentives.

There is little doubt that welfare benefits discourage work and create what economists call "moral hazard." What is less clear is their impact on family structure. Welfare benefits in real terms stabilized and then began to decline in the 1980s, whereas the rate of family breakdown continued unabated

through the mid-1990s. One analyst suggests that no more than perhaps 15 percent of family breakdown in the United States can be attributed to AFDC and other welfare programs.

The more fundamental weakness of the conservative argument is that illegitimacy is only part of a much larger story of weakening family ties—a story that includes declining fertility, divorce, cohabitation in place of marriage, the separation of cohabiting couples, and the like. Illegitimacy is primarily though not exclusively associated with poverty in the United States and most other countries. Divorce and cohabitation, however, are much more prevalent among the middle and upper classes throughout the West. It is very difficult to lay soaring divorce rates and declining marriage rates at the government's doorstep, except to the extent that the state made divorce legally easier to obtain.

Similarly, rising crime is seen by many conservatives as a result of the weakening of criminal sanctions, which occurred in the same period. Gary Becker has argued that crime can be seen as another form of rational choice: when payoffs from crime go up or costs (in terms of punishment) go down, more crimes will be committed, and vice versa. Many conservatives have argued that crime began to rise in the 1960s because society had grown permissive and the legal system was “coddling criminals.” By this reasoning, the tougher enforcement undertaken by communities across the United States in the 1980s—stiffer penalties, more jails, and in some cases more police officers on the streets—was one important reason for falling crime rates in the 1990s.

Although improved policing methods and stronger penalties may well have had a lot to do with declining crime rates in the 1990s, it is hard to argue that the great upsurge in crime in the 1960s was simply the product of police permissiveness. It is true that the United States constrained its police forces and prosecutors in the interests of the rights of criminal defendants through a series of Supreme Court decisions in the 1960s, most notably *Miranda v. Arizona*. But police departments quickly learned how to accommodate what were perfectly legitimate concerns over police procedure. A great deal of recent criminological theory ascribes crime to poor socialization and impulse control relatively early in life. It is not that potential criminals do not respond rationally to punishment; rather, the propensity to commit crimes or to respond to given levels of punishment is heavily influenced by upbringing. What may be more relevant to understanding a sudden upsurge in crime is changes in mediating social institutions such as families, neighborhoods, and schools that were taking place in the same period, and changes in the signals that the broader culture was sending to young people.

The Great Disruption was caused by a broad cultural shift. This brings us to cultural explanations, which are the most plausible of the three presented here. Increasing individualism and the loosening of communal controls clear-

ly had a huge impact on family life, sexual behavior, and the willingness of people to obey the law. The problem with this line of explanation is not that culture was not a factor but rather that it gives no adequate account of timing: why did culture, which usually evolves extremely slowly, suddenly mutate with extraordinary rapidity after the mid-1960s?

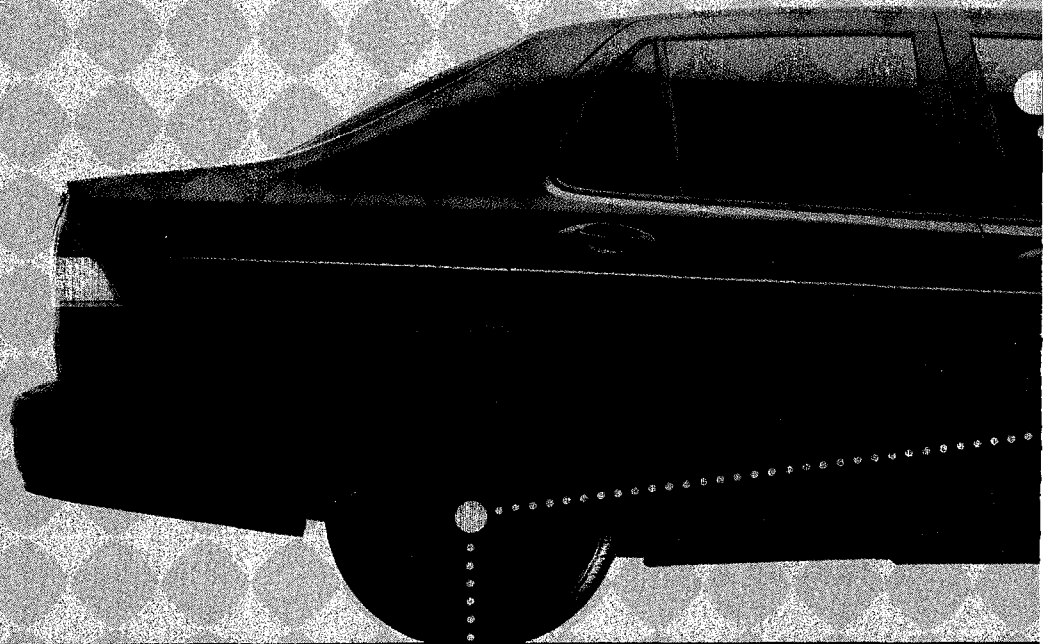
In Britain and the United States the high point of communal social control was the last third of the nineteenth century, when the Victorian ideal of the patriarchal conjugal family was broadly accepted and adolescent sexuality was kept under tight control. The cultural shift that undermined Victorian morality may be thought of as layered: At the top was a realm of abstract ideas promulgated by philosophers, scientists, artists, academics, and the occasional huckster and fraud, who laid the intellectual groundwork for broad-based changes. The second level was one of popular culture, as simpler versions of complex abstract ideas were promulgated through books, newspapers, and other mass media. Finally, there was the layer of actual behavior, as the new norms implicit in the abstract or popularized ideas were embedded in the actions of large populations.

The decline in Victorian morality can be traced to a number of intellectual developments at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, and to a second wave that began in the 1940s. At the highest level of thought, Western rationalism began to undermine itself by concluding that no rational grounds supported universal norms of behavior. This was nowhere more evident than in the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, the father of modern relativism. Nietzsche in effect argued that man, the “beast with red cheeks,” was a value-creating animal, and that the manifold “languages of good and evil” spoken by different human cultures were products of the will, rooted nowhere in truth or reason. The Enlightenment had not led to self-evident truths about right or morality; rather, it had exposed the infinite variability of moral arrangements. Attempts to ground values in nature, or in God, were doomed to be exposed as willful acts on the part of the creators of those values. Nietzsche's aphorism “There are no facts, only interpretations” became the watchword for later generations of relativists under the banners of deconstructionism and postmodernism.

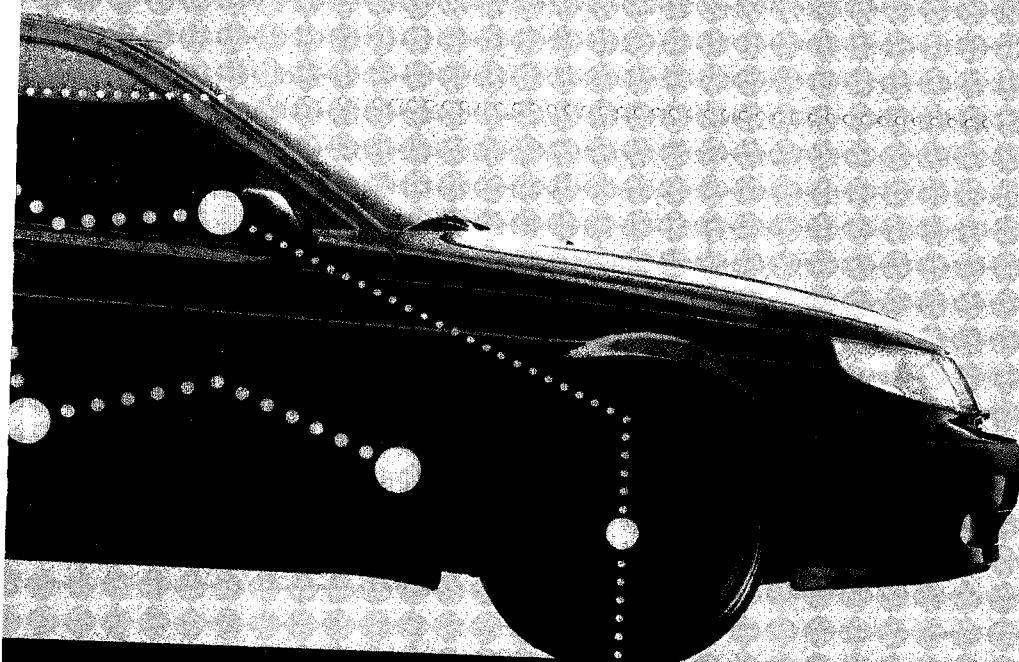
In the social sciences the undermining of Victorian values was first the work of psychologists. John Dewey, William James, and John Watson, the founder of the behaviorist school of psychology, for differing reasons all contested the Victorian and Christian notion that human nature was innately sinful, and argued that tight social controls over behavior were not necessary for social order. The behaviorists argued that the human mind was a Lockean tabula rasa waiting to be filled with cultural content; the implication was that human beings were far more malleable through social pressure and policy than people had heretofore believed. Sigmund Freud was, of course, enormously influential in

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promulgating the idea that neurosis originated in the excessive social repression of sexual behavior. Indeed, the spread of psychoanalysis accustomed an entire generation to talking about sex and seeing everyday psychological problems in terms of the libido and its repression.

The cultural historian James Lincoln Collier points to the years on either side of 1912 as critical to the breakdown of Victorian sexual norms in the United States. It was in this period that a series of new dances spread across the nation,

WOODCOCK

If you must possess something,
own it as she does her scrubby acre,
her seasonal work, the nomad's habit
of messing up the grass
until it looks like a careless footstep

and calling the fuss a nest
before laying two spotted eggs
upon which to fix
a native vigilance.

Claim it as she claims
these impatient evenings of early spring,
many footsteps in the weeds.
Try to acquire something
of her reckless voice,
the bright tines of the repeated bleeps
as she declares the precise coordinates
of all she wishes to conceal.

If necessary, take to the air
in ever more eccentric circles,
as her mate does, his nosedive
the last thing visible before dark.

And when you move on,
after the chicks have mastered
their own cryptic coloring,
migrate defiantly.
Be glad to be done
with this quarried-to-death terrain.

—ERICA FUNKHOUSER

along with the opinion that decent women could be seen in dance clubs; the rate of alcohol consumption increased; the feminist movement began in earnest; movies and the technology of modern mass entertainment appeared; literary modernism, whose core was the perpetual delegitimization of established cultural values, moved into high gear; and sexual mores (judging by what little empirical knowledge we have of this period) began to change. Collier argues that the intellectual and cultural grounds for the sexual revolution of the 1960s had already been laid among American elites by the 1920s. Their spread through the rest of the population was delayed, however, by the Depression and the Second World War, which led people to concentrate more on economic survival and domesticity than on self-expression and self-gratification—which most, in any event, could not afford.

The crucial question about the changes in social norms that occurred during the Great Disruption is therefore not whether they had cultural roots, which they obviously did, but how we can explain the timing and speed of the subsequent transformation. We know that culture tends to change very slowly in comparison with other factors, such as economic conditions, public policies, and ideology. In those cases where cultural norms have changed quickly, such as in rapidly modernizing Third World societies, cultural change is clearly being driven by socioeconomic change and is therefore not an autonomous factor.

So with the Great Disruption: the shift away from Victorian values had been occurring gradually for two or three generations by the time the disruption began; then all of a sudden the pace of change sped up enormously. It is hard to believe that people throughout the developed world simply decided to alter their attitudes toward such elemental issues as marriage, divorce, child-rearing, authority, and community so completely in the space of two or three decades without that shift in values being driven by other powerful forces. Those explanations that link changes in cultural variables to specific events in American history, such as Vietnam, Watergate, or the counterculture of the 1960s, betray an even greater provincialism: why were social norms also disrupted in other societies, from Sweden and Norway to New Zealand and Spain?

If these broad explanations for the Great Disruption are unsatisfactory, we need to look at its different elements more specifically.

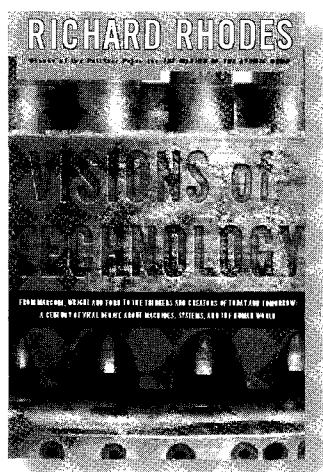
WHY RISING CRIME?

ASSUMING that increases in the crime rate are not simply a statistical artifact of improved police reporting, we need to ask several questions. Why did crime rates increase so dramatically over a relatively short period and in such a wide range of countries? Why are rates beginning to level off or decline in the United States and several other Western countries?

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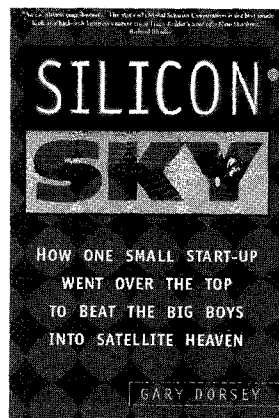
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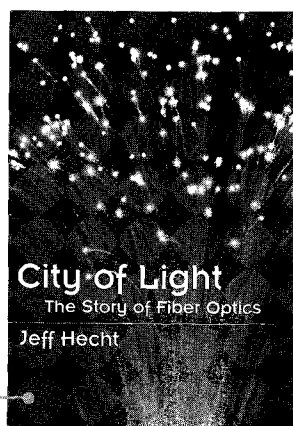
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The first and perhaps most straightforward explanation for rising crime rates from the late 1960s to the 1980s, and declining rates thereafter, is a simple demographic one. Crime tends to be committed overwhelmingly by young males aged fifteen to twenty-four. There is doubtless a genetic reason for this, having to do with male propensities for violence and aggression, and it means that when birth rates go up, crime rates will rise fifteen to twenty-four years later. In the United States the number of young people aged fifteen to twenty-four increased by two million from 1950 to 1960, whereas the next decade added 12 million to this age group—an onslaught that has been compared to a barbarian invasion. Not only did greater numbers of young people increase the pool of potential criminals, but their concentration in a “youth culture” may have led to a more-than-proportional increase in efforts to defy authority.

The Baby Boom, however, is only part of the explanation for rising crime rates in the 1960s and 1970s. One criminologist has estimated that the increase in the U.S. murder rate was ten times as great as would be expected from shifts in the demographic structure alone. Other studies have shown that changes in age structure do not correlate well with increases in crime cross-nationally.

A second explanation links crime rates to modernization and related factors such as urbanization, population density, opportunities for crime, and so forth. It is a commonsense proposition that there will be more auto theft and burglary in large cities than in rural areas, because it is easier for criminals to find automobiles and empty homes in the former than in the latter. But urbanization and a changing physical environment are poor explanations for rising crime rates in developed countries after the 1960s. By 1960 the countries under consideration were already industrialized, urbanized societies; no sudden shift from countryside to city began in 1965. In the United States murder rates are much higher in the South than in the North, despite the fact that the latter tends to be more urban and densely populated. Indeed, violence in the South tends to be a rural phenomenon, and most observers who have looked closely into the matter believe that the explanation for high crime rates there is cultural. Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore are among the most densely populated, overcrowded urban environments in the world, and yet they did not experience rising crime rates as that urbanization was occurring. This suggests that the human social environment is much more important than the physical one in determining levels of crime.

A third category of explanation is sometimes euphemistically labeled “social heterogeneity.” That is, in many societies crime tends to be concentrated among racial or ethnic minorities; to the extent that societies become more ethnically diverse, as virtually all Western developed countries have over the past two generations, crime rates can be expected to rise. The reason that crime rates are frequently

higher among minorities is very likely related, as the criminologists Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin have argued, to the fact that minorities are kept from legitimate avenues of social mobility in ways that members of the majority community are not. In other cases the simple fact of heterogeneity may be to blame: neighborhoods that are too diverse culturally, linguistically, religiously, or ethnically never come together as communities to enforce informal norms on their members. But only part of the blame for rising crime rates in the United States can be placed on immigration.

A fourth explanation concerns the more or less contemporaneous changes in the family. The currently dominant school of American criminology holds that early-childhood socialization is one of the most important factors determining the level of subsequent criminality. That is, most people do not make day-to-day choices about whether or not to commit crimes based on the balance of rewards and risks, as the rational-choice school sometimes suggests. The vast majority of people obey the law, particularly with regard to serious offenses, out of habit that was learned relatively early in life. Most crimes are committed by repeat offenders who have failed to learn this basic self-control. In many cases they are acting not rationally but on impulse. Failing to anticipate consequences, they are undeterred by the expectation of punishment.

WHY RISING DISTRUST?

IN the realm of trust, values, and civil society, we need to explain two things: why there has been a broad-based decline in trust both in institutions and in other people, and how we can reconcile the shift toward fewer shared norms with an apparent growth in groups and in the density of civil society.

The reasons for the decline of trust in an American context have been debated extensively. Robert Putnam argued early on that it might be associated with the rise of television, since the first cohort that grew up watching television was the one that experienced the most precipitous decline in trust levels. Not only does the content of television breed cynicism in its attention to sex and violence, but the fact that Americans spend an average of more than four hours a day watching TV limits their opportunities for face-to-face social activities.

One suspects, however, that a broad phenomenon like the decline of trust has a number of causes, of which television is only one. Tom Smith, of the National Opinion Research Center, performed a statistical analysis of the survey data on trust and found that the lack of it correlates with low socioeconomic status, minority status, traumatic life events, religious polarization, and youth. Poor and uneducated people tend to be more distrustful than the well-to-do or those who have gone to college. Blacks are significantly more distrust-

ful than whites, and there is some correlation between distrust and immigrant status. The traumatic life events affecting trust include, not surprisingly, being a victim of crime and being in poor health. Distrust is associated both with those who do not attend church and with fundamentalists. And younger people are less trusting than older ones.

Which of these factors has changed since the 1960s in a way that could explain the decrease in trust? Income inequality has increased somewhat, and Eric Uslaner, of the University of Maryland, has suggested that this may account for some of the increase in distrust. But poverty rates have fluctuated without increasing overall in this period, and for the vast majority of Americans the so-called "middle-class squeeze" did not represent a drop in real income so much as a stagnation of earnings.

Crime increased dramatically from the mid-sixties to the mid-nineties, and it makes a great deal of sense that someone who has been victimized by crime, or who watches the daily cavalcade of grisly crime stories on the local TV news, would feel distrust not for immediate friends and family but for the larger world. Hence crime would seem to be an important explanation for the increase in distrust after 1965, a conclusion well supported in more-detailed analyses.

The other major social change that has led to traumatic life experiences has been the rise of divorce and family breakdown. Commonsensically, one would think that children who have experienced the divorce of their parents, or have had to deal with a series of boyfriends in a single-parent household, would tend to be-

come cynical about adults in general, and that this might go far toward explaining the increased levels of distrust that show up in survey data.

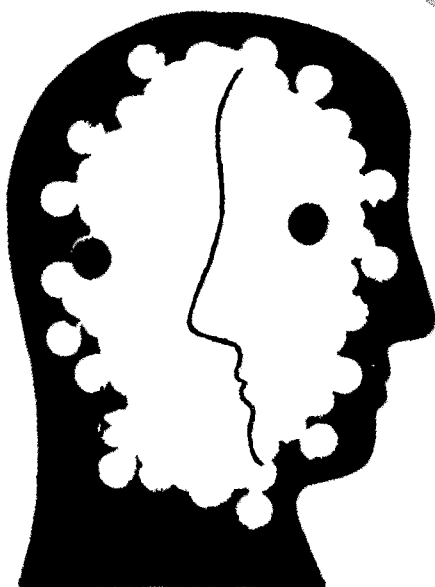
Despite the apparent decline in trust, there is evidence that groups and group membership are increasing. The most obvious way to reconcile lower levels of trust with greater levels of group membership is to note a reduction in the radius of trust. It is hard to interpret the data either on values or on civil society in any other way than to suggest that the radius of trust is diminishing, not just in the United States but across the developed world. That is, people continue to share norms and values in ways that constitute social capital, and they join groups and organizations in ever larger numbers. But the groups have shifted dramatically in kind. The authority of most large organizations has declined, and the importance in people's lives of a host of smaller associations has grown. Rather than taking pride in being a member of a powerful labor federation or working

for a large corporation, or in having served in the military, people identify socially with a local aerobics class, a New Age sect, a co-dependent support group, or an Internet chat room. Rather than seeking authoritative values in a church that once shaped the society's culture, people are picking and choosing their values on an individual basis, in ways that link them with smaller communities of like-minded folk.

The shift to smaller-radius groups is mirrored politically in the almost universal rise of interest groups at the expense of broad-based political parties. Parties like the German Christian Democrats and the British Labour Party take a coherent ideological stand on the whole range of issues facing a society, from national defense to social welfare. Though usually based in a particular social class, these parties unite a broad coalition of interests and personalities. Interest groups, on the other hand, focus on single issues such as saving rain forests or promoting poultry farming in the upper Midwest; they may be transnational in scope, but they are much less authoritative, both in the range of issues they deal with and in the numbers of people they bring together.

Contemporary Americans, and contemporary Europeans as well, seek contradictory goals. They are increasingly distrustful of any authority, political or moral, that would constrain their freedom of choice, but they also want a sense of community and the good things that flow from community, such as mutual recognition, participation, belonging, and

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identity. Community therefore has to be found in smaller, more flexible groups and organizations whose loyalties and membership can overlap, and where entry and exit entail relatively low costs. People may thus be able to reconcile their contradictory desires for autonomy *and* community. But in this bargain the community they get is smaller and weaker than most of those that have existed in the past. Each community shares less with neighboring ones, and has relatively little hold on its members. The circle that people can trust is necessarily narrower. The essence of the shift in values at the center of the *Great Disruption*, then, is the rise of moral individualism and the consequent miniaturization of community. These explanations go partway toward explaining why cultural values changed after the 1960s. But at the Great Disruption's core was a shift in values concerning sex and the family—a shift that deserves special emphasis.

MEN BEHAVING BADLY

ALTHOUGH the role of mother can safely be said to be grounded in biology, the role of father is to a great degree socially constructed. In the words of the anthropologist Margaret Mead, "Somewhere at the dawn of human history, some social invention was made under which males started nurturing females and their young." The male role was founded on the provision of resources; "among human beings everywhere [the male] helps provide food for women and children." Being a learned behavior, the male role in nurturing the family is subject to disruption. Mead wrote,

But the evidence suggests that we should phrase the matter differently for men and women—that men have to learn to want to provide for others, and this behaviour, being learned, is fragile and can disappear rather easily under social conditions that no longer teach it effectively.

The role of fathers, in other words, varies by culture and tradition from intense involvement in the nurturing and education of children to a more distant presence as protector and disciplinarian to the near absence possible for a paycheck provider. It takes a great deal of effort to separate a mother from her newborn infant; in contrast, it often takes a fair amount of effort to involve a father with his.

When we put kinship and family in this context, it is easier to understand why nuclear families have started to break apart at such a rapid rate over the past two generations. The family bond was relatively fragile, based on an exchange of the woman's fertility for the man's resources. Prior to the Great Disruption, all Western societies had in place a complex series of formal and informal laws, rules, norms, and obligations to protect mothers and children by limiting the freedom of fathers to simply ditch one family and start another. Today many people have come to think of marriage as a kind of public celebration of a sexual and emotional union

between two adults, which is why gay marriage has become a possibility in the United States and other developed countries. But it is clear that historically the institution of marriage existed to give legal protection to the mother-child unit, and to ensure that adequate economic resources were passed from the father to allow the children to grow up to be viable adults.

What accounts for the breakdown of these norms constraining male behavior, and of the bargain that rested on them? Two very important changes occurred sometime during the early postwar period. The first involved advances in medical technology—that is, birth control and abortion—that permitted women to better control their own reproduction. The second was the movement of women into the paid labor force in most industrialized countries and the steady rise in their incomes—hourly, median, and lifetime—relative to men's over the next thirty years.

The significance of birth control was not simply that it lowered fertility. Indeed, if the effect of birth control is to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies, it is hard to explain why its advent should have been accompanied by an explosion of illegitimacy and a rise in the abortion rate, or why the use of birth control is positively correlated with illegitimacy across the OECD.

The main impact of the Pill and the sexual revolution that followed it was, as the economists Janet Yellen, George Akerlof, and Michael Katz have shown, to dramatically alter calculations about the risks of sex, and thereby to change *male* behavior. The reason that the rates of birth-control use, abortion, and illegitimacy went up in tandem is that a fourth rate—the number of shotgun marriages—declined substantially at the same time. By these economists' calculations, in the period 1965–1969 some 59 percent of white brides and 25 percent of black brides were pregnant at the altar. Young people were, evidently, having quite a lot of premarital sex in those years, but the social consequences of out-of-wedlock childbearing were mitigated by the norm of male responsibility for the children produced. By the period 1980–1984 the percentages had dropped to 42 and 11, respectively. Because birth control and abortion permitted women for the first time to have sex without worrying about the consequences, men felt liberated from norms requiring them to look after the women they got pregnant.

The second factor altering male behavior was the entry of women into the paid labor force. That female incomes should be related to family breakdown is an argument accepted by many economists, and elaborated most fully by Gary Becker in his work *A Treatise on the Family* (1981). The assumption behind this view is that many marriage contracts are entered into with imperfect information: once married, men and women discover that life is not a perpetual honeymoon, that their spouse's behavior has changed from what it was before marriage, or that their own expectations

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for partners have changed. Trading in a spouse for someone new, or getting rid of an abusive mate, had been restricted by the fact that many women lacking job skills or experience were dependent on husbands. As female earnings rose, women became better able to support themselves and to raise children without husbands. Rising female incomes also increase the opportunity costs of having children, and therefore lower fertility. Fewer children means less of what Becker characterizes as the joint capital in the marriage, and hence makes divorce more likely.

A subtler consequence of women's entering the labor force was that the norm of male responsibility was further weakened. In divorcing a dependent wife, a husband would have to face the prospect of either paying alimony or seeing his children slip into poverty. With many wives earning incomes that rivaled those of their husbands, this became less of an issue. The weakening norm of male responsibility, in turn, reinforced the need for women to arm themselves with job skills so as not to be dependent on increasingly unreliable husbands. With a substantial probability that a first marriage will end in divorce, contemporary women would be foolish not to prepare themselves for work.

The decline of nuclear families in the West had strongly negative effects on social capital and was related to an increase in poverty for people at the bottom of the social hierarchy, to increasing levels of crime, and finally to declining trust. But pointing to the negative consequences for social capital of changes in the family is in no way to blame women for these problems. The entry of women into the workplace, the steady closing of the earnings gap with men, and the greater ability of women to control fertility are by and large good things. The most important shift in norms was in the one that dictated male responsibility for wives and children. Even if the shift was triggered by birth control and rising female incomes, men were to blame for the consequences. And it is not as if men always behaved well prior to that: the stability of traditional families was often bought at a high price in terms of emotional and physical distress, and also in lost opportunities—costs that fell disproportionately on the shoulders of women.

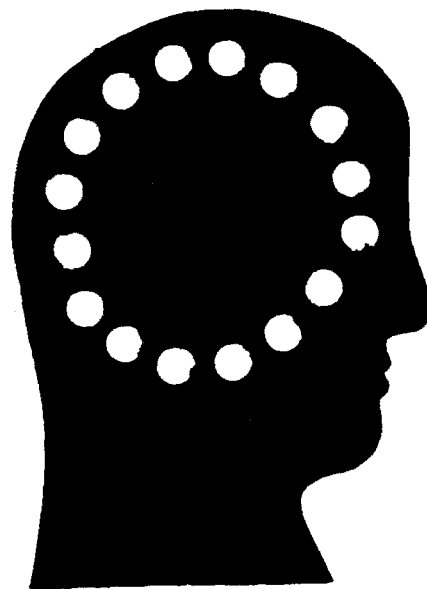
On the other hand, these sweeping changes in gender roles have not been the unambiguously good thing that some feminists pretend. Losses have accompanied gains, and those losses have fallen disproportionately on the shoulders of children. This should not surprise anyone: given the fact

that female roles have traditionally centered on reproduction and children, we could hardly expect that the movement of women out of the household and into the workplace would have no consequences for families.

Moreover, women themselves have often been the losers in this bargain. Most labor-market gains for women in the 1970s and 1980s were not in glamorous Murphy Brown kinds of jobs but in low-end service-sector jobs. In return for meager financial independence, many women found themselves abandoned by husbands who moved on to younger wives or girlfriends. Because older women are considered less sexually attractive than older men, they had much lower chances of remarrying than did the husbands who left them. The widening of the gap among men between rich and poor had its counterpart among women: educated, ambitious, and talented women broke down barriers, proved they could succeed at male occupations, and saw their incomes rise; but many of their less-educated, less-ambitious, and less-talented sisters saw the floor collapse under them, as they tried to raise children by themselves while in low-paying, dead-end jobs or on welfare. Our consciousness of this process has been distorted by the fact that the women who talk and write and shape the public debate about gender issues come almost exclusively from the former category.

In contrast, men have on balance come out about even. Although many have lost substantial status and income, others (and sometimes the same ones) have quite happily been freed of burdensome responsibilities for wives and children. Hugh Hefner did

THE
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and the sexual revolution
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change male behavior.
that followed it was to dramatize
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change male behavior.



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not invent the Playboy lifestyle in the 1950s; casual access to multiple women has been enjoyed by powerful, wealthy, high-status men throughout history, and has been one of the chief motives for seeking power, wealth, and high status in the first place. What changed after the 1950s was that many rather ordinary men were allowed to live out the fantasy lives of hedonism and serial polygamy formerly reserved to a tiny group at the very top of society. One of the greatest frauds perpetrated during the Great Disruption was the notion that the sexual revolution was gender-neutral, benefiting women and men equally, and that it somehow had a kinship with the feminist revolution. In fact the sexual revolution served the interests of men, and in the end put sharp limits on the gains that women might otherwise have expected from their liberation from traditional roles.

RECONSTRUCTING SOCIAL ORDER

HOW can we rebuild social capital in the future? The fact that culture and public policy give societies some control over the pace and degree of disruption is not in the long run an answer to how social order will be established at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Japan and some Catholic countries have been able to hold on to traditional family values longer than Scandinavia or the English-speaking world, and this may have saved them some of the social costs experienced by the latter. But it is hard to imagine that they will be able to hold out over the coming generations, much less re-establish anything like the nuclear family of the industrial era, with the father working and the mother staying at home to raise children. Such an outcome would not be desirable, even if it were possible.

We appear to be caught, then, in unpleasant circumstances: going forward seems to promise ever-increasing levels of disorder and social atomization, at the same time that our line of retreat has been cut off. Does this mean that contemporary liberal societies are fated to descend into increasing moral decline and social anarchy, until they somehow implode? Were Edmund Burke and other critics of the Enlightenment right that anarchy was the inevitable product of the effort to replace tradition and religion with reason?

The answer, in my view, is no, for the very simple reason that we human beings are by nature designed to create moral rules and social order for ourselves. The situation of normlessness—what the sociologist Emile Durkheim labeled “anomie”—is intensely uncomfortable for us, and we will seek to create new rules to replace the ones that have been undercut. If technology makes certain old forms of community difficult to sustain, then we will seek out new ones, and we will use our reason to negotiate arrangements to suit our underlying interests, needs, and passions.

To understand why the present situation isn’t as hopeless

as it may seem, we need to consider the origins of social order per se, on a more abstract level. Many discussions of culture treat social order as if it were a static set of rules handed down from earlier generations. If one was stuck in a low-social-capital or low-trust country, one could do nothing about it. It is true, of course, that public policy is relatively limited in its ability to manipulate culture, and that the best public policies are those shaped by an awareness of cultural constraints. But culture is a dynamic force, one that is constantly being remade—if not by governments then by the interactions of the thousands of decentralized individuals who make up a society. Although culture tends to evolve more slowly than formal social and political institutions, it nonetheless adapts to changing circumstances.

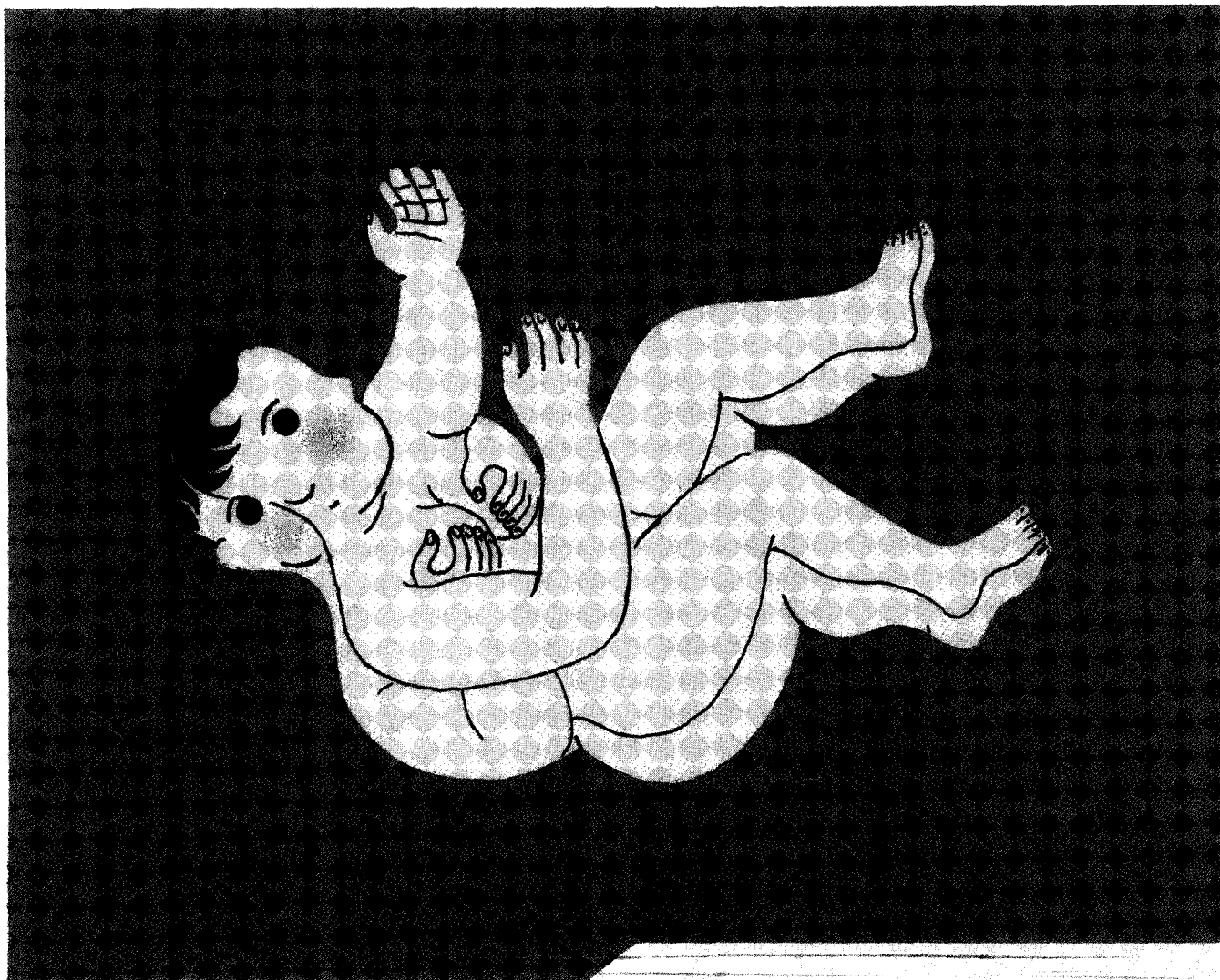
What we find is that order and social capital have two broad bases of support. The first is biological, and emerges from human nature itself. There is an increasing body of evidence coming out of the life sciences that the standard social-science model is inadequate, and that human beings are born with pre-existing cognitive structures and age-specific capabilities for learning that lead them naturally into society. There is, in other words, such a thing as human nature. For the sociologists and anthropologists, the existence of human nature means that cultural relativism needs to be rethought, and that it is possible to discern cultural and moral universals that, if used judiciously, might help to evaluate particular cultural practices. Moreover, human behavior is not nearly as plastic and therefore manipulable as their disciplines have assumed for much of this century. For the economists, human nature implies that the sociological view of human beings as inherently social beings is more accurate than their own individualistic model. And for those who are neither sociologists nor economists, an essential humanity confirms a number of commonsense understandings about the way people think and act that have been resolutely denied by earlier generations of social scientists—for example, that men and women are different by nature, that we are political and social creatures with moral instincts, and the like. This insight is extremely important, because it means that social capital will tend to be generated by human beings as a matter of instinct.

The biological revolution that has been under way in the second half of the twentieth century has multiple sources. The most startling advances have been made at the level of molecular biology and biochemistry, where the discovery of the structure of DNA has led to the emergence of an entire industry devoted to genetic manipulation. In neurophysiology great advances have been made in understanding the chemical and physiological bases of psychological phenomena, including an emerging view that the brain is not a general-purpose calculating machine but a highly modular organ with specially adapted capabilities. And finally, on the level of macro behavior, a tremendous amount of new work has been done in animal ethology, behavioral genetics, primatology, and evolu-

tionary psychology and anthropology, suggesting that certain behavioral patterns are much more general than previously believed. For instance, the generalization that females tend to be more selective than males in their choice of mates proves to be true not only across all known human cultures but across virtually all known species that reproduce sexually. It would seem to be only a matter of time before the micro and macro levels of research are connected: with the mapping of complete gene sequences for fruit flies, nematodes, rats, and eventually human beings, it will be possible to turn individual gene sequences on and off and directly observe their effects on behavior.

gument, and dialogue among individuals. Order does not need to proceed from the top down—from a lawgiver (or, in contemporary terms, a state) handing down laws or a priest promulgating the word of God.

Neither natural nor spontaneous order is sufficient in itself to produce the totality of rules that constitutes social order per se. Either needs to be supplemented at crucial junctures by hierarchical authority. But when we look back in human history, we see that self-organizing individuals have continuously been creating social capital for themselves, and have managed to adapt to technological and economic changes greater than those faced by Western societies over the past two generations.



The second basis of support for social order is human reason, and reason's ability to spontaneously generate solutions to problems of social cooperation. Mankind's natural capabilities for creating social capital do not explain how social capital arises in specific circumstances. The creation of particular rules of behavior is the province of culture rather than nature, and in the cultural realm we find that order is frequently the result of a process of horizontal negotiation, ar-

PERHAPS the easiest way to get a handle on the Great Disruption's future is to look briefly at great disruptions of the past. Indices of social order have increased and decreased over time, suggesting that although social capital may often seem to be in the process of depletion, its stock has increased in certain historical periods. The political scientist Ted Robert Gurr estimates that homicide rates in England were three times as high in the thirteenth century as in

the seventeenth, and three times as high in the nineteenth as in the nineteenth; in London they were twice as high in the early nineteenth century as in the 1970s. Both conservatives decrying moral decline and liberals celebrating increased individual choice sometimes talk as if there had been since the early 1600s a steady movement away from Puritan values. But although a secular trend toward greater individualism has been evident over this long time period, many fluctuations in behavior have suggested that societies are perfectly capable of increasing the degree of constraint on individual choice through moral rules.

The Victorian period in Britain and America may seem to many to be the embodiment of traditional values, but Victorianism was in fact a radical movement that emerged in reaction to widespread social disorder at the beginning of the nineteenth century—a movement that deliberately sought to create new social rules and instill virtues in populations that were seen as wallowing in degeneracy.

It would be wrong to assert that the greater social order that came to prevail in Britain and America during the Victorian period was simply the result of changing moral norms. In this period both societies established modern police forces, which replaced the hodgepodge of local agencies and poorly trained deputies that had existed at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the United States after the Civil War the police focused attention on such minor offenses against public order as public drinking, vagrancy, loitering, and the like, leading to a peak in arrests for this kind of behavior around 1870. Toward the end of the century many

states had begun to establish systems of universal education, which sought to put all American children into free public schools—a process that began somewhat later in Britain. But the essential change that took place was a matter of values rather than institutions. At the core of Victorian morality was the inculcation of impulse control in young people—the shaping of what economists today would call their preferences—so that they would not indulge in pleasures like casual sex, alcohol, and gambling.

There are other examples from other cultures of moral renovation. The feudal Tokugawa period in Japan—when power was held by various *daimyo*, or warrior lords—was one of insecurity and frequent violence. The Meiji Restoration, which took place in 1868, established a single centralized state, and stamped out once and for all the kind of banditry that had taken place in feudal Japan. The country developed a new moral system as well.

We think of a custom like the lifetime employment that is practiced by large Japanese firms as an ancient cultural tradition, but in fact it dates back only to the late nineteenth century, and was fully implemented among large companies only after the Second World War. Before then there was a high degree of labor mobility; skilled craftsmen in particular were in short supply and constantly on the move from one company to another. Large Japanese companies like Mitsubishi and Mitsubishi found that they could not attract the skilled labor they needed, and so, with the help of the government, they embarked on a successful campaign to elevate the virtue of loyalty above others.

COULD the pattern experienced in the second half of the nineteenth century in Britain and America, or in Japan, repeat itself in the next generation or two? There is growing evidence that the Great Disruption has run its course, and that the process of re-norming has already begun. Growth in the rates of increase in crime, divorce, illegitimacy, and distrust has slowed substantially, and in the 1990s has even reversed in many of the countries that experienced an explosion of disorder over the past two generations. This is particularly true in the United States, where levels of crime are down a good 15 percent from their peaks in the early 1990s. Divorce rates peaked in the early 1980s, and births to single mothers appear to have stopped increasing. Welfare rolls have diminished almost as dramatically as crime rates,

HUMAN beings are designed to create moral rules and social order. If technology makes certain old forms of community difficult, then we will seek out new ones.



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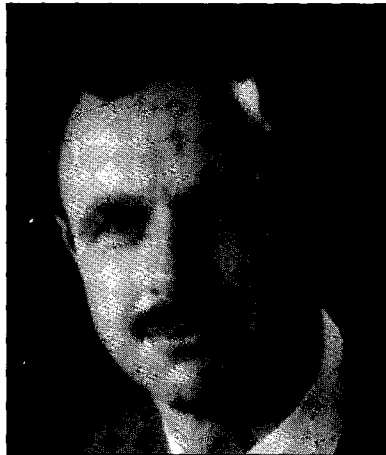
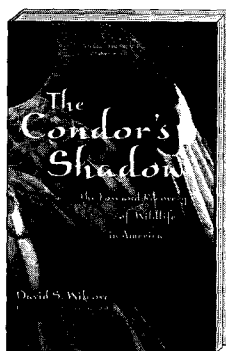


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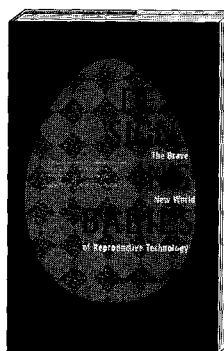


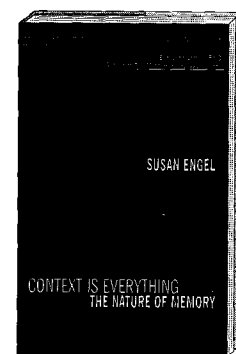
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in response both to the 1996 welfare-reform measures and to the opportunities provided by a nearly full-employment economy in the 1990s. Levels of trust in both institutions and individuals have also recovered significantly since the early 1990s.

How far might this re-norming of society go? We are much more likely to see dramatic changes in levels of crime and trust than in norms regarding sex, reproduction, and family life. Indeed, the process of re-norming in the first two spheres is already well under way. With regard to sex and reproduction, however, the technological and economic conditions of our age make it extremely doubtful that anything like a return to Victorian values will take place. Strict rules about sex make sense in a society in which unregulated sex has a high probability of leading to pregnancy and having a child out of wedlock is likely to lead to destitution, if not early death, for both mother and child. The first of these conditions disappeared with birth control; the second was greatly mitigated, though not eliminated, by a combination of female incomes and welfare subsidies. Although the United States has cut back sharply on welfare, no one is about to propose making birth control illegal or reversing the movement of women into the workplace. Nor will the individual pursuit of rational self-interest solve the problems posed by declining fertility: it is precisely the rational interest of parents in their children's long-term life chances that induces them to have fewer children. The importance of kinship as a source of social connectedness will probably continue to decline, and the stability of nuclear families is likely never to fully recover. Those societies, such as Japan and Korea, that have until now bucked this trend are more likely to shift toward Western practices than the reverse.

Some religious conservatives hope, and liberals fear, that the problem of moral decline will be resolved by a large-scale return to religious orthodoxy—a Western version of the Ayatollah Khomeini returning to Iran on a jetliner. For a variety of reasons this seems unlikely. Modern societies are so culturally diverse that it is not clear whose version of orthodoxy would prevail. Any true orthodoxy is likely to be seen as a threat to large and important groups in the society, and hence would neither get very far nor serve as a basis for a widening radius of trust. Rather than integrating society, a conservative religious revival might in fact accelerate the movement toward fragmentation and moral miniaturization: the various varieties of Protestant fundamentalism would argue among themselves over doctrine; orthodox Jews would become more orthodox; Muslims and Hindus might start to organize themselves as political-religious communities, and the like.

A return to religiosity is far more likely to take a more benign form, one that in some respects has already started to appear in many parts of the United States. Instead of community arising as a by-product of rigid belief, people will come to religion because of their desire for community. In

other words, people will return to religion not necessarily because they accept the truth of revelation but precisely because the absence of community and the transience of social ties in the secular world make them hungry for ritual and cultural tradition. They will help the poor or their neighbors not necessarily because doctrine tells them they must but rather because they want to serve their communities and find that faith-based organizations are the most effective means of doing so. They will repeat ancient prayers and re-enact age-old rituals not because they believe that they were handed down by God but rather because they want their children to have the proper values, and because they want to enjoy the comfort and the sense of shared experience that ritual brings. In this sense they will not be taking religion seriously on its own terms but will use religion as a language with which to express their moral beliefs. Religion becomes a source of ritual in a society that has been stripped bare of ceremony, and thus is a reasonable extension of the natural desire for social relatedness with which all human beings are born. It is something that modern, rational, skeptical people can take seriously in much the way that they celebrate national independence, dress up in traditional ethnic garb, or read the classics of their own cultural tradition. Understood in these terms, religion loses its hierarchical character and becomes a manifestation of spontaneous order.

Religion is one of the two main sources of an enlarged radius of trust. The other is politics. In the West, Christianity first established the principle of the universality of human dignity, a principle that was brought down from the heavens and turned into a secular doctrine of universal human equality by the Enlightenment. Today we ask politics to bear nearly the entire weight of this enterprise, and it has done a remarkably good job. Those nations built on universal liberal principles have been surprisingly resilient over the past 200 years, despite frequent setbacks and shortcomings. A political order based on Serb ethnic identity or Twelver Shi'ism will never grow beyond the boundaries of some corner of the Balkans or the Middle East, and could certainly never become the governing principle of large, diverse, dynamic, and complex modern societies like those that make up, for example, the Group of Seven.

There seem to be two parallel processes at work. In the political and economic sphere history appears to be progressive and directional, and at the end of the twentieth century has culminated in liberal democracy as the only viable choice for technologically advanced societies. In the social and moral sphere, however, history appears to be cyclical, with social order ebbing and flowing over the course of generations. There is nothing to guarantee upturns in the cycle; our only reason for hope is the very powerful innate human capacity for reconstituting social order. On the success of this process of reconstruction depends the upward direction of the arrow of History.☞

COMBINATIONS *of* JACKSONS

by CHARLES PORTIS



INTRODUCTION

IN an article about the novelist Charles Portis last year in *Esquire*, Ron Rosenbaum wrote, “Portis has become the subject of a kind of secret society, a small but extremely elite . . . group of admirers among other writers who consider him perhaps the least-known great writer in America. . . . A writer who—if there’s any justice in literary history as opposed to literary celebrity—will come to be regarded as the author of classics on the order of a twentieth-century Mark Twain.” Attempting several years ago to explain the special regard in which Portis is held by his admirers, Roy Blount Jr. wrote in these pages, “The first novel, *Norwood*, is the text reread most often by Portis devotees, who say things like ‘The way I decided whether to marry my wife: I gave her *Norwood* and waited. And then I heard her laughing upstairs.’” The Overlook Press is reissuing four of Portis’s novels, beginning with *The Dog of the South* in May and *Norwood* in August. Both books appeared recently on Modern Library’s Web-site listing of the best 100 novels published in English since 1900, as selected by readers.

Before he turned to fiction writing, Portis was a reporter for the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, the *Arkansas Gazette*, and the *New York Herald-Tribune*. He is perhaps best known for his second novel, *True Grit*, the movie version of which starred John Wayne. “*Combinations of Jacksons*,” a memoir of growing up in a small Arkansas town during the Second World War, is Portis’s fourth contribution to *The Atlantic Monthly*.



I MADE my first experiments in breathing underwater at the age of nine, in 1943. It was something I needed to learn in life so as to be ready to give my pursuing enemies the slip. At that time they were Nazi spies and Japanese saboteurs.

The trick looked simple enough in the movie serials, which pulled me along from one Saturday to the next with such chapter titles as “Fangs of Doom!” and “In the Scorpion’s Lair!” First you cut a reed. You put one end of the reed in your mouth and lay face up, very still, on the bottom of a shallow stream. The other end was projected above the surface of the stream, and through this hollow shaft, as you lay buried alive in water, you *breathed*.

Agents of the Axis Powers were never far behind me. I could slow them a little with pinecone grenades, but I couldn’t stop them. They came crashing through the woods firing their Lugers at me as I raced barefooted for the reed beds of Beech Creek, a last hope. If I could get there in time to make my arrangements, then the agents in their stupid fury would overlook the life-giving reed, one among so many, and, with their boots splashing down eight inches away from my rigid underwater body, go stupidly on their way downstream.

My attempts to bring this off took place in Cypress Creek and Smackover Creek, too—“smackover” being an Arkansas rendering of “chemin couvert,” covered path, or road. These and Beech Creek were the swimming streams nearest to my home town, at the time, of Mount Holly, in Union County, Arkansas, which adjoins Union Parish, Louisiana. The name dates from the territorial days of the 1820s, when “Union” had a pleasing ring to it in the Jacksonian South, where the many sons of Jack came to settle and multiply.

Reeds grew here in abundance, in ponds and swamps and along creek banks, or what I took to be reeds, but they were the wrong kind of reeds, if in fact they were reeds. The green ones weren’t hollow. The brown ones, the dead and withered stalks, were somewhat hollow but too thin to carry much air, not even enough to sustain a gasping kind of life in a skinny little boy. They also tended to collapse, like wet paper drinking straws, with the first sharp intake of breath. In or out of the water, you couldn’t breathe through our reeds.

Our quicksand was a bust too, or I would have lured those running men to their deaths in the slough near Cypress Creek. Not Cypress Slough or the Slough of Despond or of anything else. That dark marsh wasn’t big enough or distinctive enough to have a proper name; it was just “the slew.” When I had led the men there and they were stuck fast in the gray mud, I would have looked on from a hump of firm ground, deaf to their pleas, refusing to hold out a pole to them, waiting—will these spies never sink?—until the earth had swallowed them whole. It couldn’t have worked out that way though, because

our quicksand, or quickmud, while quivering nicely underfoot, had no lethal depth, and may even have been slightly buoyant, and therapeutic to boot. I could never manage to sink more than about knee-deep in it.

Bamboo (“cane,” we called it) was more promising than reeds, and we had plenty of that in the canebrakes. These woody shafts were thicker and stronger than reeds, and almost hollow, if not quite. Inside, at each circular joint, there was a partial blockage of some white pithy matter. With a long rattail file and a good deal of poking and blowing, it took me about five minutes to clear the pith. This was more like it. Now I had a sturdy and serious breathing tube, made on the spot from the materials at hand. I was man, the toolmaker.

Still, questions remained. My knife would be there, ready, in my pocket (or one of a series of knives, two-blade Barlows mostly, which I kept losing)—ready for cutting reeds and cane, for carving crude, nonreturning boomerangs, for slicing two neat little drainage Xs across snake-bite punctures, for cutting off the sputtering ends of fuses leading to well-marked kegs of BLASTING POWDER planted in the bowels of hydroelectric dams, for cutting loose the ropes from any female reporters I might come across who had been left bound and gagged in remote cabins—ready for any wartime emergency. My Barlow was at the service of the nation. So much for the knife.

But was it likely that I would have a rattail file handy? Or—with a pack of killers at my heels, led by a tall man who ran with his monocle in place—the necessary five minutes, undisturbed, for all that reaming and poking of pith? Making every allowance for that, would my bamboo breathing tube, standing stark upright in the shallows of Smackover Creek, really fool anyone? It looked just like a breathing tube.

The war was much on my mind in those days, and it was almost entirely the one being fought on movie screens and in the pulp pages of “funny books,” known as comic books in other parts of the country. Both names were misleading for the kind I liked, the ones featuring costumed vigilantes who made violent swoops on spy rings and gang hideouts, with no Miranda palaver. Along with Superman and Batman, there were many others, now largely forgotten, such as Bulletman, Plastic Man, The Sandman, Doll Man (a fighting homunculus about six inches tall, in a red cape), The Human Torch, Daredevil, Blue Beetle, Captain Marvel, Captain Midnight, and Captain America. Under any name the books were quite a bargain early on, at sixty-four pages in color for a dime. Or a kind of color. The palette was limited; Superman had blue hair. I never tired of the repetitive stories or the familiar scenes that were enacted over and over again.

LOIS: But wait, Superman! What about my scoop?

SUPERMAN: (Bounding skyward) No time for that now,

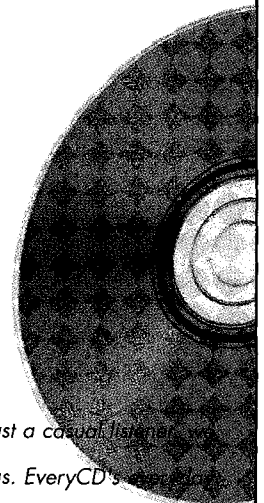
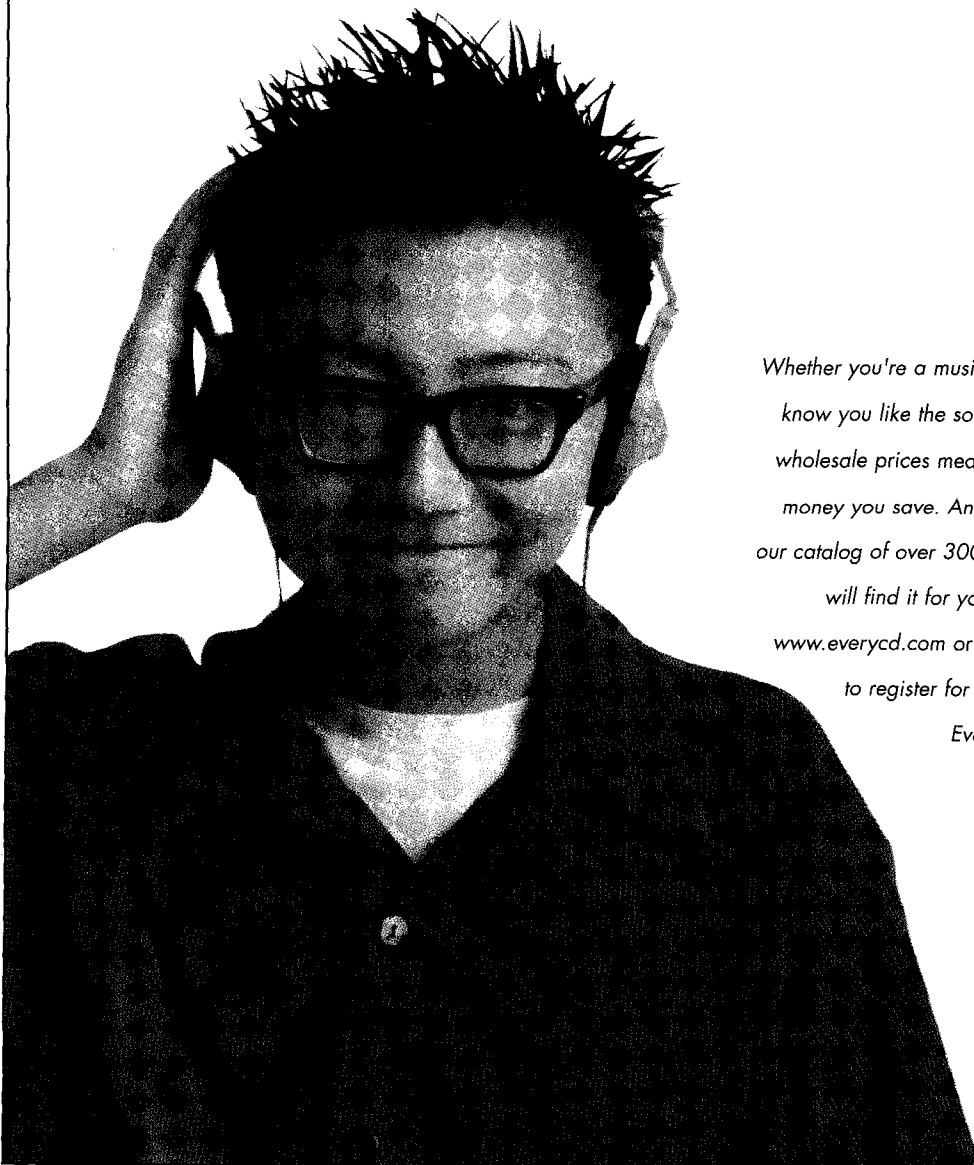
Lois! I’m off to scramble some—YEGGS!!

LOIS: (Tiny fists on hips) Well, of all th—!???



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THE course of events in the early part of the war, the real war, was much too confusing for me to follow. My picture of the fighting in Europe, vivid if false, was of two great armies, and only two, facing each other at some one fixed place. Like many generals, I was fighting the last war. The armies were locked in constant battle, night and day, winter and summer. The din never ceased, and there was a lot of smoke. I may have picked up the smoke from a popular country song of the time, which still chimes out in my head every two or three years, as though from a long tape loop.

*There'll be smoke on the water
On the land and the sea
When our armee and navee
Overtake the eneme.*

The only movement was a certain ponderous wavering of the battle line. One side would at last falter and give way altogether, and that would be the end. I knew we would win. A great-uncle by the name of Satterfield Fielding had assured me of that.

I was only eight years old but I remember the day well, early in 1942, when he told me the war would be over in ninety days—that we would sink the Japanese fleet in no time, just as we had taken care of the Spanish fleet at Manila Bay in 1898, the work of a few hours. He also told me that if I would dip a brand of snuff called Garrett Scotch, I would never get TB, but that Garrett Sweet was no good and I would do well to leave it alone.

Uncle Sat shot deer the year round, like Robin Hood, in season and out, as the whim or the need moved him, and he may well have been the last man in America who without being facetious called food “vittles” (“actuals,” a perfectly good word, and correctly pronounced “vittles,” but for some reason thought to be countrified and comical). He was a strong and fluent talker with far-ranging opinions. Attention wandered in the family as he ran on, except when he spoke from experience. There would be bits of hunting lore (“A real turkey could never win a turkey-calling contest”) and tips on growing unfashionable corn (nonhybrid) and bumblebee cotton (hill cotton—stunted, unfluffy bolls) and on the best ways of dynamiting fish (“dinnamite,” he called it) in the Saline River and Hurricane Creek.

There was some sort of family gathering on that day at his farm, small but his own, in the backwoods of Grant County, Arkansas, and everyone was scoffing and laughing at his notions about the war. Always impatient with him, groaning and rolling her eyes, his sister Emma (my grandmother) could be counted on to check him in his longer flights with “Oh, why don’t you just hush, Sat. All you know is what you read in *The Sheridan Headlight*.” Wounding indeed, if true.

He came out onto the back porch alone, already angry, and caught me dropping feathers into his water well. I was hanging over the upper framework of the well, dropping

chicken feathers and guinea feathers one by one, to watch how they floated about on the surface of the still round pool down there. He gave me a shaking for feathering his drinking water, and then took me into his kitchen and showed me some blurred newspaper maps, perhaps from the *Headlight*.

They were scale maps of Japan and the United States, comparison maps, side by side. Here were the Japanese home islands, a little ragged chain of fragments, mere bits of flot-sam. Over here, all of a piece, was the great continental mass that was the United States of America. A revelation. No one had told me about this. Uncle Sat watched me closely to see if I alone out of all these dense Fieldings, Waddells, and Portises could grasp his strategic point. It was clear enough to me: a small country had foolishly attacked a big one. It was fangs of doom. There was nothing more to worry about.

And yet I did worry. The war went on and on. Enemy agents with the faces of rats and hogs appeared to be gaining the upper hand in the funny books I read so greedily. These busy men were all around us, wrecking trains, scattering tacks on our highways, stealing the plans for our Boeing P-26 and our Brewster Buffalo, pouring deadly poisons into our city reservoirs, always from a “vial” or some curiously small bottle. They tempted us to waste gasoline and whispered that we need not save cooking fats for the munitions industry if we didn’t feel like it. They changed some of our most brilliant scientists into morons with a colorless and odorless moron gas, pumped into the scientists’ laboratories by way of a hand-bellows rig and a piece of rubber tubing.



IT was possible to lose, as I was reminded whenever I saw my great-grandfather, Alexander Waddell, usually at family reunions, where he would be seated on display in the parlor of a great-aunt in Pine Bluff, holding a walking stick between his knees with his purplish hands. “Uncle Alec,” as he was known generally, in and out of the family, was born in 1847, the same year as Jesse James, and, like Jesse, had fought for the Confederate States of America as a boy soldier, though not as a regular.

I don’t know how zealous he was for the cause—enough, at least, to take up arms in defense of Jefferson County and the rest of southern Arkansas. The blood was up, at varying degrees of heat, out of a vast agricultural tedium from East Texas to Virginia, and the (white) boys walking behind mules and middlebuster ploughs rallied to repel what they saw as the invader of their new sovereign nation. President Lincoln had called out his troops to put down what he saw as an insurrection, “by combinations of Jacksons too powerful to be suppressed by the ordinary course of judicial proceedings.” I think he wrote “combinations of Jacksons” in

that momentous proclamation, but I quote from memory.

The southern boys responded to such recruiting notices as this one, placed in a Memphis newspaper, *The Appeal*, by Nathan Bedford Forrest, the rich slave trader and legendary cavalry commander, who was to have twenty-nine horses shot from under him:

200 Recruits Wanted!

I will receive 200 able-bodied men if they will present themselves at my headquarters by the first of June with good horse and gun. I wish none but those who desire to be actively engaged. My headquarters for the present is at Corinth, Miss. Come on, boys, if you want a heap of fun and to kill some Yankees.

N. B. Forrest
Colonel, Commanding
Forrest's Regiment

I suspect that the first part of that was written or edited by a meddlesome young staff officer, chewing on a pencil. ("Can't have *wish* here twice in a row, so I'll make it, what—*desire*, yes—the second time around.") The last sentence, shifting into the imperative mood, is Forrest himself, forthright as a pirate.

Uncle Alec had been a county and probate judge, and he still had his wits about him in 1943—no mismated shoes, no long hesitations in speech, groping for a name or some common noun. But his memories of the Civil War, or the ones he saw fit to recall in mixed company, ran mostly to jocular anecdotes, at least in my hearing. I didn't have sense enough or interest enough to ask him questions, and I was further impaired by lockjaw in the presence of very old people. Apart from the comic stories, three things that he said about the war have stuck in my head.

1. That his duties as a young private, and a small one at that, were, for the most part, watering and saddling the horses, and riding off here and there at a gallop on a partly blooded horse, a fast horse, with messages. (A great drama must have a young messenger appearing briefly onstage, to bring some piece of devastating news and move the story along.)

2. How a heavy bank of fog settled low over the battleground at Jenkins' Ferry on April 30, 1864, and how the steady Yankees from Wisconsin and Iowa, backed up there against the flooding Saline River but not lacking for ammunition, stopped one frontal assault after another by firing blindly but effectively in volleys, through the fog and under it. The Arkansas troops made a try, and then the Missouri and Texas troops, 6,000 men all told. All were cut down or sent reeling back. In a matter of hours they took a thousand casualties. (Missouri, a slave state, didn't secede, despite the efforts of the governor, a Democrat named Claiborne Jackson. Nor did Kentucky, another slave state. But they did provide the southern armies with many fine soldiers—many more wore blue—and the eleven-state Confederacy did claim them as part of the new federation. Thus the auspicious—it was vainly hoped—thirteen stars on the battle flag, in this "second war for independence.")

3. How, after that fight, and after the Union soldiers had made their escape across the river on a shaky "India-rubber" pontoon bridge, hundreds of abandoned mules were running loose in the canebrakes, big 1,200-pound U.S. Army mules—which is to say free tractors for the destitute local farmers, or such few as were left, and them mostly old men, women, and children.

That Federal army of 12,000 men, commanded by Major General Frederick Steele, had set out from occupied Little Rock on March 23 for Shreveport, where it was to meet another Union Army column, escorted by a naval armada of sixty-two gunboats and transports with a brigade of U.S. Marines aboard, coming up the Red River in Louisiana. Neither force made it to Shreveport. The trans-Mississippi South, much neglected by Richmond, still had a few kicks left.

Steele was stopped in southern Arkansas at Camden, eighteen miles from Mount Holly. In a series of battles, culminating with the one at Jenkins' Ferry, the Federals were driven all the way back to Little Rock, on short rations and in cold rain and mud. Steele lost 2,750 men on the expedition, along with 635 wagons, 2,500 mules, and "enough horses to mount a brigade of cavalry," and counted himself fortunate. A fast-moving Stonewall Jackson, had one been present, would have cut him off in the rear and bagged the entire lot.

Steele almost had one more casualty in Wild Bill Hickok, a Union scout, who rode into Camden ahead of the army, put on a gray uniform, and did some spying. Something of a regional celebrity even then, he was soon recognized and had to make a run for it, "a bold dash" across the battle lines at Prairie d'Ane, on his horse, Black Nell. One account has him shooting two pursuing Confederate officers as Nell made "a mighty leap" over "an obstruction" (log? rail fence? ditch?). That is, Hickok twisted about in the saddle or stood in the stirrups and turned, cocked and fired his single-action revolver at least twice, and picked off two closing riders on the fly, all this while Nell was airborne. Well, maybe. In any case, it was a bold escape, and "a shout of triumph from the ten thousand troops in line greeted him, and he was the hero of the day."

In the fight at Poison Spring there were some scalpings, when a C. S. A. brigade of Choctaw cavalry clashed with a Federal regiment of black troops, the 1st Kansas (Colored), which had been operating, and plundering, on Choctaw lands in the Indian Territory, later to become Oklahoma. (The "poison spring," now in a state park, was misnamed through a misunderstanding. It still flows and still bears that name, but the unremarkable water isn't toxic or even bad-tasting.)

A white cavalry regiment, the 29th Texas, also carried a grudge against the 1st Kansas troops, who had driven it from the field in an earlier fight at Honey Springs, in the Territory. When the two met again, here at Poison Spring, in Arkansas, the Texans shouted across the lines that they would give no

quarter. This time they won, and they gave no quarter. The Texans, the Arkansans, the Choctaws, and the Missourians shot some prisoners and finished off some of the wounded with bayonets and scalping knives. Not for the faint of heart, these late, bitter engagements. Murder and brutalities on both sides were common enough in this remote corner of the war, where it was waged, as the military historian Edwin C. Bearss writes, "with a savagery unheard of in the East." Little was made of it. To those eastern gentlemen in Richmond and Washington, the trans-Mississippi theater of operations wasn't so much a theater as some dim thunder offstage.

IT may be that by 1943 Uncle Alec was just bored with all that, as with many other things, all cold potatoes now, but the memories hadn't evaporated. Long after his death I heard a few things he had told the men in the family, now a little garbled in the retelling by second and third parties. One said that he had joined a Jefferson County militia unit at the age of sixteen or seventeen, after his brother Joseph was killed fighting in Georgia, and that he remained with that unit until the war ended. Another one said no, that was only partly true, that he and another boy had later left the militia to ride with what Uncle Alec called "a company" (troop) of partisan cavalry, raised and commanded by a shadowy Captain Jonas (or Jonus) Webb, from Pine Bluff (Jefferson County).

This Webb, all business, not much in the chivalry line, carried on a rough and semi-private little campaign of his own across southern Arkansas. He did on occasion, at his own convenience, work with the official C. S. A. command, as at Jenkins' Ferry. A Confederate soldier named Fine Gordon, in a reminiscence after the war, mentioned Webb in passing, and darkly enough, as "a mean captain of the Southern Army at Camden."

Webb's troop and similar bands roamed freely in that last, lawless year of the war, and were something of a nuisance to both armies, to say nothing of the local farmers, who were being bled white by foraging parties demanding food, fodder, livestock, and whatever else they fancied, at gunpoint. Brigadier General Joseph O. (Jo) Shelby, commanding a C. S. A. brigade (and sometimes a division) of Missouri cavalry in Arkansas, regarded the guerrillas as little better than slackers and highwaymen, and became so furious with them as to publish a general warning: "I will enlist you in the Confederate army; or I will drive you into the Federal ranks. You shall not remain idle spectators of a drama enacted before your eyes." Here again, I think, we see the hand of a literary adjutant.

The general did, however, have a soft spot for Quantrill's bushwhackers, and for one in particular, Frank James, who had saved Shelby from capture earlier in the war at the Battle of Prairie Grove, Arkansas. Some twenty years later, in August of 1883, Jo Shelby appeared as a defense witness for Frank, at his murder trial in Gallatin, Missouri. The charge was that in July of 1881, while robbing a Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific train with four other men, Alexander Franklin

James had shot and killed a passenger named Frank McMillan. One of the bandits, Dick Liddil, characterized by the prosecutor as "the least depraved" member of the James Gang, identified Frank in court as the killer. Perhaps he was, or it may have been his brother Jesse who did the deed; it was almost certainly Jesse who shot and killed the conductor of the train, one William Westfall. But in 1883 Jesse James was beyond the grasp of the court, having been murdered himself the year before—shot in the back of the head by Bob Ford, of ballad infamy.

*It was Robert Ford, that dirty little coward,
I wonder how he does feel,
For he ate of Jesse's bread and he slept in Jesse's bed,
Then he laid Jesse James in the grave.*

Frank was found not guilty, and there followed an uproar in Republican newspapers over what was seen as a scandalous verdict. It isn't clear how much influence General Shelby had on the jury, if any. Not that it mattered. The defense attorneys, in connivance with the sheriff, had packed the jury with twelve Democrats. And Jo Shelby wasn't at his best on that day. He—who had refused to surrender in 1865 and rode to Mexico City on horseback with his brigade, fighting his way through bandits and Juaristas, to offer his saber, in the service of another lost cause, to Maximilian, the young Hapsburg Emperor of Mexico—came to the Missouri courtroom a little drunk and unsteady on his feet.

He had to be guided to the witness chair, and, once seated, had some trouble locating the judge and jury. Twisting about in his seat, he tried to address first one and then the other. He argued with the lawyers and abused Dick Liddil. "God bless you, old fellow," he said to Frank, catching sight of him at the defense table. The judge wasn't amused. He found the general in contempt for coming to court "in a condition unfit to testify" and fined him \$10.

That was more punishment than Frank got, or was to get the next year, when he was tried in Huntsville, Alabama, for the 1881 robbery of a Federal paymaster. Once again, a jury with Confederate sympathies found him not guilty.

Other charges against him here and there, such as the one in Hot Springs, Arkansas, near which he and Jesse and the Younger brothers had robbed a stagecoach in January of 1874, were dropped or simply not pressed. (All the coach passengers were robbed. One, a G. R. Crump, of Memphis, got his watch and money back when Cole Younger learned that he had been a Confederate soldier—or so one story has it.) The State of Minnesota might also have made a claim on him, for the Northfield bank raid in September of 1876, but didn't bother to pursue it.

The law, for all practical purposes, was now finished with Frank. An old friend advised him to go back home to the farm in Missouri, to keep his head down and stay away from low company and fast horses. He had already surrendered his car-

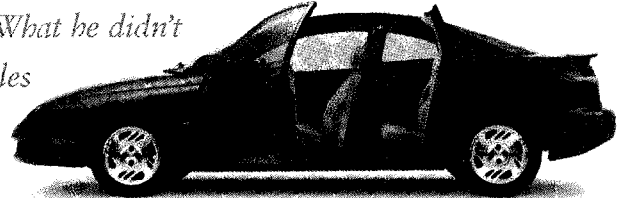
"You've got mail."

How Karl Schab came to buy a new Saturn.

After nearly two years of working in Russia, Karl Schab was ready to come home.

But first he was going to need a car.

So Karl did what any intelligent engineer assigned to the international space station project in Moscow would do—he went into cyberspace and contacted the Saturn Web site. As a former Saturn owner, Karl knew pretty much what he was looking for. What he didn't know was how to make everything happen from 5,536 miles away so that his new car would be waiting for him when he returned home to Colorado Springs.

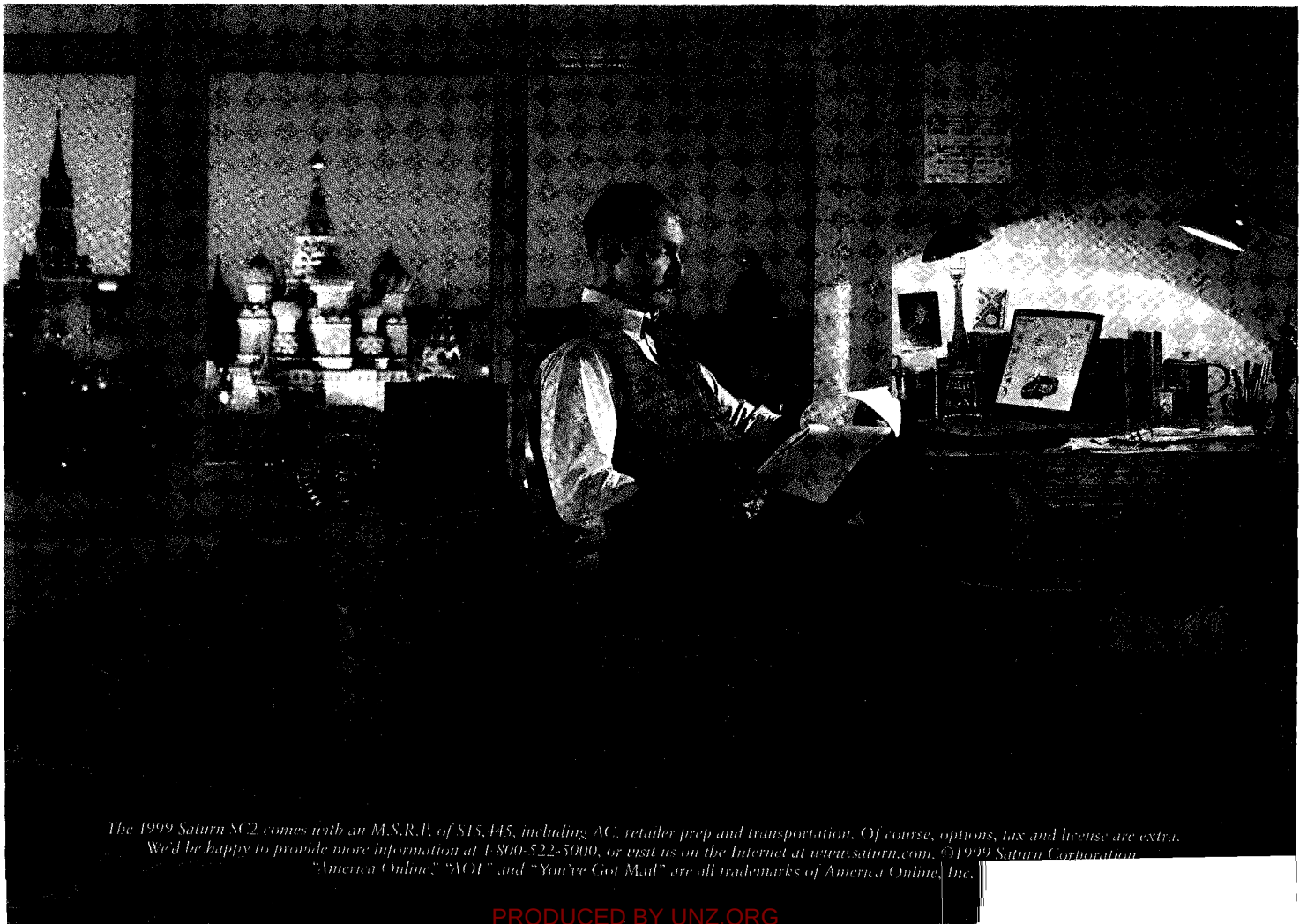


Enter Saturn sales consultant Larry Marr. After several e-mails back and forth, Larry had answered all of Karl's concerns, even explaining many of the finance options available. And on February 6, 1998, at 22:51:46 (Moscow time) Karl Schab ordered a brand-new Saturn online.

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tridge belt and his Remington .44 revolver. That was the end of the James Gang, and in a sense, in a kind of inglorious coda, the end of the end of the war, too, at long last. Or, no, that sounds pretty good, "coda," almost convincing, but it's wrong. The real end of the war came twenty years later, in 1904, in the very heart of the country, far from Fort Sumter, at a reunion of Quantrill's guerrillas in Independence, Missouri. There, in that election year, Frank brazenly announced that his choice for President was the sitting one, Theodore Roosevelt—the *New York Republican*. This didn't go down well, and he almost came to blows with his old hard-riding comrades. Unseemly spectacle, coots flailing away.

Unless there was another, better ending still later. For more than a century now, at intervals of about five years, southern editorial writers have been seeing portents in the night skies and proclaiming The End of the War, at Long Last, and the blessed if somewhat tardy arrival of The New South. By that they seem to mean something the same as, culturally identical with, at one with, the rest of the country, and this time they may be on to something, what with our declining numbers of Gaylons, Coys, and Virgils, and the disappearance of Clabber Girl Baking Powder signs from our highways, and of mules, standing alone in pastures. Then there is the new and alien splendor to be seen all about us, in cities with tall, dark, and featureless glass towers, though I'm told that deep currents are flowing here, far beyond the ken of editorial wretches in their cluttered cubicles. A little underground newsletter informs me that these peculiar glass structures are designed with care, by sociologists and architects working hand in

glove with the CIA, as dark and forbidding boxes, in which combinations of Jacksons are thought least likely to gather, combine further, smoke cigarettes, brood, conspire, and break loose again out of a long lull.

Unlike the border ruffians Jesse (who sometimes called himself J. T. Jackson) and his brother Frank, Uncle Alec taught school for a while after the war, in cahoots with a carpetbagger from Indiana, one of the dumber ones, come south with his roomy bag to get in on the political plunder, to make his fortune in impoverished and all but depopulated Grant County, Arkansas. They were a pair of unlikely pedagogues. Uncle Alec could read and write and do his sums, which is all you need to know, but he was a very young man. The carpetbagger was older but illiterate. Uncle Alec, then, did the teaching, probably of a more basic and effective nature than is common today in public schools, and the carpetbagger did nothing except collect the monthly salary, of something like \$20, which they split down the middle. The victor's spoils came to around thirty cents a day.

It was the carpetbaggers, of course, who named the county—a new one, formed largely from the western end of Jefferson County—for General Grant. Rubbing a little more salt in the open wound, they called the county seat Sheridan. That postbellum movement into the South of all the pale cranks in the Midwest, similar to one of those sudden squirrel migrations in the woods, has been overlooked, I think, as a source of some of the weirdness to be met with in our region.

I never knew my paternal great-grandfather, Colonel John W. Portis, who was a much older man (1818–1902) than Uncle Alec. He commanded an infantry regiment, the 42nd Alabama, was wounded in the Battle of Corinth, and was starved out in the siege of Vicksburg. I have the surrender parole he signed there on July 10, 1863 (the garrison had actually surrendered on the fourth), in which he gave his "solemn parole under oath that I will not take up arms again against the United States . . . until duly exchanged."

Some Uncle Sat of the day, looking up from his maps, could have told him and President Davis (shouted it, more likely) that with the fall of this city fortress on the bluffs of the Mississippi, and the simultaneous disaster at Gettysburg, in distant Pennsylvania, President Lincoln's re-election was pretty well assured, and the war lost. They wouldn't have listened. One more good push or two and the weary Yankees—"Those people," General Lee called them (graceless humanoids?)—must lose heart, flinch, and cut their losses. *Enough of these Jacksons! Great God almighty! Let them go and be done with them!* Such were the hopes. The next summer, duly exchanged, Colonel Portis was back in the field, at the Battle of Atlanta, and he didn't sign his final surrender parole until June 2, 1865, at Citronelle, Alabama, some two months after General Lee's surrender at Appomattox. This parole document gives a physical description: six feet tall, gray eyes, white hair. In three years of war he had gone white.

TERM

At the last minute a word is waiting
not heard that way before and not to be
repeated or ever be remembered
one that always had been a household word
used in speaking of the ordinary
everyday recurrences of living
not newly chosen or long considered
or a matter for comment afterward
who would ever have thought it was the one
saying itself from the beginning through
all its uses and circumstances to
utter at last that meaning of its own
for which it had long been the only word
though it seems now that any word would do

—W. S. MERWIN



MY Alabama grandmother wasn't pleased when her youngest son (a seventh son, my father) told her of his plans to marry an Arkansas girl. She kindly explained to him that the unfortunate women living west of the Mississippi River had, among other defects, feet at least one size bigger than those of their dainty little sisters to the east. No Cinderella to be found in the Bear State. Any mention of that old slander, even a teasing one fifty years later, could still make my placid mother bristle and blaze up a little. In any kind of refined-foot contest, she said, she would pit her Waddell-Fielding-Arkansas feet against all comers with Portis-Poole-Alabama feet.

My father was a dutiful son, but he defied his mother in this matter and married Alice, the Arkansas girl. So, a new family, a mingling of blood, a new combination of Jacksons, so to speak. We fetched up in southern Arkansas, at Mount Holly, where at dusk ("dusk-dark," it was called there) flying squirrels glided across our front yard, from oak to oak. I haven't seen one since.

Now a not quite deserted village, Mount Holly then had two cotton gins, a sawmill, two schools (white and black), a bank, a post office, a café, a barbershop, an ice house, three general stores and a sawmill commissary, a few moonshiners and bootleggers, one auto mechanic, one blacksmith, who was also the constable, and one known white Republican. My father pointed him out to me. (Now in much of the South it is the white Democrat to be pointed out with a whisper, as for a sighting of the ivory-billed woodpecker.) Some blacks still voted, when not deterred by the poll tax or some courthouse chicanery, for the Grand Old Party of Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt, but by that time, the early 1940s, most had switched their allegiance to Franklin Roosevelt if not to the local "lily white" Democratic Party groups. They had also begun to christen their baby boys with his Dutch surname.

What was a bit odd, on two counts, Mount Holly proper had only one church, and that the true church of the elect, Presbyterian. The normal ratio at that time and place was about two Baptist churches or one Methodist church per gin. It usually took about three gins to support a Presbyterian church, and a community with, say, four before you found enough tepid idolaters to form an Episcopal congregation. There was always difficulty in getting a minister who pleased everyone. What the elders of the church kept looking for, my father said, and what was hard to find in the 1940s, was a wise, saintly, hearty, scholarly, eloquent thirty-five-year-old Confederate veteran, who would be content to live on a small salary, in something pretty close to apostolic poverty.

On Saturdays we usually drove to El Dorado, the county seat and a flourishing oil town then, with two refineries. One was owned by Lion Oil, a palindrome. Black-market gaso-

line was readily available, outside the rationing system, but my father, scrupulous in such things, refused to buy it, and we made do on the four or five gallons a week he was allotted by the B sticker on his windshield. (B was better than A; an A got less.) There was little chocolate to be had. The schoolyard rumor was that all the Clark bars were going to the Japanese-American internment camps over at Rohwer and Jerome, in the Delta, and to the German prisoners of war (most of them from Rommel's Afrika Korps) up at Camp Chaffee, in the hills. A patriot like me had to do without. (We schoolboys would have been hard pressed to explain the difference between the two classes of prisoners. I can't remember hearing anyone, adults included, question or even discuss the need for "relocating" the Japanese-Americans from California. President Roosevelt had sent them here, so it must be all right.) We lived in a place where they sent prisoners; what to make of that?

Gasoline and candy bars were much less important to me than movie theaters, or, as we called them, picture shows. The tale unfolding on the screen was a picture show, and the theater building itself was also a picture show. El Dorado had four. The Majestic was fairly noisy, and the Ritz a little noisier. The shabby and disreputable old Star was very noisy indeed, with the hubbub of a pack of unruly boys, much on the move. At the Star you sometimes had to try two or three of the folding seats before finding one that didn't pinch your leg, or tip you forward and dump you. There were frequent delays, as the celluloid film itself, or an image of it, turned brown, writhed, curled, and caught fire before our eyes. The breakdown would be followed at once by piercing whistles and animal howls of outrage, a performance in itself by little shriekers who had been eagerly awaiting the cue to show their stuff. No rats, though, in disgusting numbers, pattering about underfoot at the Star, as was widely believed. The story was kept alive by my fastidious older sister (Star = rats at play) and others like her who had never set foot in the place. This isn't to say that an occasional rogue rat never darted down an aisle there.

I made a round of these three picture shows (and how well I knew that circuit, starting from the courthouse square), seeking out the best program. Decisions came hard. A very good bill would have been a chapter of the Captain Marvel or Dick Tracy serial, a Spike Jones comedy short, a Boston Blackie feature, and a Western with Tim McCoy, George O'Brien, or Johnny Mack Brown, my favorite cowboys. And yet there were so many things to consider before I committed myself irreversibly to a twelve-cent ticket. For example, Bob Steele was better with his fists than any of my favorites. Ken Maynard was a better rider. Ken—and even I could sense that he wasn't much of an actor, perhaps to his credit—vaulted over the rump of his horse in the fast-getaway mount with a light swagger that always pleased me.

When I was younger and in her keeping, my sister sometimes took me against my will to the fourth picture show, the

quiet Rialto, where an attentive and well-mannered audience remained seated, and where the more ambitious pictures played. Even very fat people could settle in at the Rialto without fear of being dumped and laughed at, or of having their tender and spreading flanks nipped at by the seats. I didn't object to the decorum or the comfort, just the pictures. The posters outside, which I always carefully read ("Theirs was a passion not to be denied!"), were enough to sink the hopes of a small boy. In these stories there would be some strange men scheming against each other and beating each other's brains out to see who got to marry Bette Davis, or it might be Joan Crawford. The winning suitor would get to spend every minute of the rest of his life in the company of a harriidan. I was soon asleep.

MOUNT Holly had its own summer pleasures. We, the village boys, swam like seals by day in the creeks and ponds, and at night, with our carbide lamps, we ran trotlines—a series of fishing lines hanging from a central support line that was strung across a stream. We swung from vines in the bottomlands, trying to reproduce, and never bringing off anything remotely like, Tarzan's aerial glide across the jungle, leaping from one opportune vine to the next. That, I've since learned, was even more of a cheat than I suspected: it was all done with ropes. Ignorant of the laws of physics, I did know from experience that when you jumped from a swinging vine to one that was hanging dead still and vertical, you weren't going any farther, and could only be left looking foolish, dangling there at rest. I was also uneasy, not knowing exactly why, with Batman's practice of shooting a rope line from atop a tall building across to a lower building, and then swinging *down* to the lower building on that line, which somehow remained taut.

We made model airplanes, little replicas of warplanes built far away from Mount Holly in huge factories with such satisfying corporate names as Chance Vought and Consolidated Vultee. First, with the models, there was the fragile skeleton to be assembled, of balsa ribs and stringers, and droplets of glue; this was then covered with a thin skin of paper, and painted with a dope sealant that smelled of bananas. The delicate work tried my patience, and gave me an early appreciation of how it is that real aircraft, no matter how fierce in appearance, must be the tinny and flimsy shells that they are, in order to leave the ground. In my haste, and with twinges of guilt, I sometimes cut corners, leaving out a troublesome strut or spar, like some crooked defense contractor.

We rigged up our own fireworks, with carbide (granular calcium carbide, bought in cans; it fizzes and gives off a combustible gas when mixed with water) and with black powder we compounded ourselves. We burned our own charcoal, and bought the other ingredients, sulfur and saltpeter, in little paper cartons at Bailey's store, arrayed there on the patent-medicine shelf with the big bottles of liniments, violent purgatives, female tonics, chill tonics, croup tonics, cramp tonics, catarrh

tonics, and nerve tonics. No need in those days of tonics to be put through the indignities of "a full battery of tests," at great expense, for every little sinking spell. I no longer see tonics on the shelves of country stores, that space now being given over to videocassettes. Catarrh, with its fine pair of purring *rs*, seems to have gone away too, whatever it was.

Our watermelons (not always lifted from a melon patch; you could buy one, preferably a long green Tom Watson, for about fifteen cents) we left floating in the creeks to cool as we swam, mostly in Swift Hole, on Beech Creek. The water in Swift Hole wasn't swift; moccasins swam calmly about on the surface, untroubled by the slight current. We—David Bailey, Max Lewis, Gerald Lewis, Francis Crumpler, Richie Bidwell, Buddy Portis—paid little heed to the snakes and soon scattered them with our noise and splashing and, low comedians all, with our strutting antics along the banks. No one, that I recall, was bitten there. But Swift Hole *was* a hole, deep enough that we could dive into it from a height of eight or nine feet and not crack our necks on the bottom.

A leaning tree shaded the pool, and from a high limb there hung a rope with a stick tied at the end. You grabbed the stick with both hands, ran down the sloping bank, took flight, and at the peak of the upswing let go, doing a back flip or a half gainer on the way down. Some unknown person had patiently spliced the long rope together from the separated strands of a thick oil-field hawser, and hung it there for our delight. One day it was just there. With the ingratitude of children we accepted it as part of the natural order of things, as no more than our due, and asked few questions.

Mount Holly was just outside the oil fields, but we did have one lone gas well, on Cypress Creek. A man would drive up a dirt lane to the unattended wellhead in his 1928 Ford Model A roadster, or his 1939 Chevrolet Master Deluxe sedan, and look furtively about. He would see us, some boys with purple stripes on our faces (pokeberry juice), pulling a ragged seine through the creek. Unterrified by the war paint, he would dismiss us as a threat and proceed to drain off something called "casing head" from the well, which he then poured into his gasoline tank.

This was a liquid condensate that formed in gas lines, and although it burned a little rough in car engines, it did burn, and was unrationed and free for the taking. There must have been some kind of bleeder valve in that tangle of high-pressure gas pipes, but I've forgotten how it worked, if I ever knew. I do seem to remember a Stillson wrench, an adjustable pipe wrench, in the hands of one of those furtive casing-head thieves. I remember, too, that we once dredged up a curious snake in our seine, along that same stretch of Cypress Creek. It was a rusty-orange color with a thick body and what appeared to be a barbed stinger protruding from its tail. Zoologists, who should venture outdoors more often, say the stinging snake exists only in folklore, but we were there and saw that beast. We all agreed it was a stinging snake.

It was in Beech Creek, in the shoal water below Swift Hole, that I carried on most of my underwater contortions with breathing tubes. Reeds were out, and among other rejects was a copper pipe, which left a sharp taste in the mouth. Another one, tasting worse, was a black and smelly rubber hose, a piece of old fuel line from a car, with a spiral curl to it like that of a pig's tail. I had to expose a small but conspicuous hand above the surface of the water to keep this one upright.

I kept coming back to bamboo, the best of a poor lot, and soldiered on. There was always another obstacle. When I was underwater, clutching a tree root, lying more or less supine, and took a deep draft of air through my mouth tube, an equal volume of water would come rushing in through my nose, with a strangling effect. The nose clip existed then and might have solved the problem, but I couldn't be seen with a nose clip. Only girls used nose clips. Far better to strangle. Couldn't I simply have pinched my nostrils shut with thumb and finger? Yes, nothing easier, except that both hands were already occupied, with the tube and the root. And as I lay there more or less supine on the creekbed, struggling to breathe and to hold my upper body down, then my telltale feet would rise. Feet unfettered float, for all their bones, and when toes break the surface and bob about, they will catch the eye of the dullest observer.

I never did get it all worked out to suit me, and when the war ended, in 1945, I lost interest in breathing tubes and model airplanes and black-powder bombs and cigarettes rolled with rabbit tobacco or corn silk. A spell was broken. The world had changed. I put all that juvenile dementia behind me. It was time to take on some serious responsibilities in life. I cut a coupon from the back of a funny book and bought a \$1.98 money order at the Mount Holly post office and sent them off to a place in New Jersey for a home-study course in ventriloquism.



UNCLE Alec didn't quite make it to a hundred, dying a year short, in 1946. He had lived to see the U.S. Army, still with plenty of ammunition, if not mules, on the winning end of another great war, and he was probably the last man who could remember seeing Jo Shelby riding at the head of his mounted column along the Ouachita River near Camden, or hearing another general, the portly Sterling Price, calling out for one more charge into the fog and powdersmoke at Jenkins' Ferry.

No peevish coot, he made a good showing toward the end, still jaunty, laughing quietly in his chair, and with no bits of food on his chin that I can remember. A better showing, in his dark suit, vest, watch chain, and polished leather shoes, than many of the old-timers I see today, men who went ashore at

Tarawa and Anzio, now much reduced in their retirement costume of grotesque white athletic shoes, pastel resort rompers, and white baseball cap crammed down hard on the head, bending the ears. Their model seems to be The Golfer.

A coot now myself, slightly peevish, of three score and five, I recently saw a vision in broad daylight of The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. The apparition was an old man at the wheel of an old tan Pontiac station wagon. He had stopped next to my car at a traffic light here in Little Rock. The wagon was a long, sagging barge, packed inside to the roof with lumpy objects bundled in green-plastic tarpaulins and tied up with what looked like clothesline. But what objects? At a guess, all his goods, his assets, now luggage: bits of chain, rolls of duct tape, forgotten cans of soup, jumper cables tangled around a jack frozen with rust, encrusted bottles of Tabasco sauce, sacks of Indian arrowheads, sacks of silver dimes, sacks of cat food, an old owlhead .32 revolver with a wobbly cylinder and a pitted barrel, corroded flashlights, ivory, apes, peacocks, and bottles of saw-palmetto capsules to treat the sinister prostate gland. The old man was smirking. It was the gloat of a miser. Stiff gray hairs straggled out of the little relief hole at the back of his cap, above the adjustment strap. In short, another Jackson, and while not an ornament of our race, neither was he, I thought, the most depraved member of the gang. He might even have made some claim to being a gentleman, as defined by my *Concise Oxford Dictionary*: "n. Man entitled to bear arms but not included in the nobility . . ."

There I was in the flesh, a little more weathered, just a few years from now. The resemblance was close. I saw myself sunk low there under the wheel, even to the string bolo tie with its turquoise slide, and even to that complacent smirk, knowing that all my flashlights and other treasures were right behind me, safely stowed and well hidden from the defiling gaze of others. I could see myself all too clearly in that old butter-scotch Pontiac, roaring flat out across the Mexican desert and laying down a streamer of smoke like a crop duster, with a goatherd to note my passing and (I flatter myself) to watch me until I was utterly gone, over a distant hill, and only then would he turn again with his stick to the straying flock. So be it.

Uncle Sat, who never got TB and who wouldn't let young government agents tell him how to prune his peach trees and cure his hams and who ate better food than a rich man can buy today and who never lost so much as a finger while fooling around with his detonator caps and his sticks of dynamite, was eighty-eight when he died, in 1964. I saw him now and then over the years, talking away, as ever, but I can call up his face more clearly, his red farmer's face, from an earlier time, at that kitchen table, over the newspaper maps. I can see the winter stubble in his fields, too, on that dreary January day in 1942. Broken stalks and a few dirty white shreds of bumblebee cotton. Everyone who was there is dead and buried now except me. 🌻



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The Deacon

by MARY GORDON

NO romance had been attached to Joan Fitzgerald's entering the convent. She wasn't that sort of person, and she hadn't expected it. A sense of rightness had filled her with well-being, allowed her lungs to work easily and her limbs to move quickly, removed her from the part of life that had no interest for her, and opened her to a way of being in the world that connected her to what she believed was essential. Her faith, too, was unromantic; the Jesus of the Gospels, who was with the poor and the sick, who dealt with their needs and urged people to leave father and mother to follow him—this was her inspiration. Yet when she thought of the word "inspiration," it seemed too airy, too silvery, for her experience. What she had felt was something more like a hand at her back, a light pressure between her shoulder blades. The images she had felt herself drawn toward had struck her in childhood and had not left the forefront of her mind: the black children integrating the school in Little Rock, the nuns in the Maryknoll magazine who inoculated Asian children against malaria. The source of their power was a God whose love she believed in as she believed in the love of her parents; she felt it as she had felt her parents' love; she believed that she was watched over, cared about, cared for as her parents had cared for her. She had never in her memory felt alone.

Her decision to become a nun, her image of herself as one, wasn't fed by fantasies of Ingrid Bergman or Audrey Hepburn. By the time she entered the Sisters of the Visitation, the number of candidates was dwindling and almost no one was wearing the habit except the very oldest sisters in the order; she'd been advised to get her college education first, and by

the time she entered the order, in 1973, only two others were in her class. After twenty-five years she was a school principal in New York City and the only member of her class still in the order.

They joked about it, she and the other sisters, about how they'd missed the glamour days, and now they were just the workhorses, the unglamorous moms, without power and without the aura of silent sanctity that fed the faithful's dreams. "Thank God Philida's good-looking, or they'd think we were a hundred percent rejects," Rocky said, referring to the one sister living with them who was slender and graceful, with large turquoise eyes and white hands that people seemed to focus on—which she must have known, because she wore a large turquoise-and-silver ring she had gotten when she worked on an Indian reservation in New Mexico. Rocky and the fourth sister had grown roly-poly in middle age. They didn't color their hair, they had no interest in clothes, and they knew they looked like caricatures of nuns. "Try, as a penance, not to buy navy blue," Rocky had said. They seemed drawn to navy and neutral colors. They weren't very interested in how they looked. They had all passed through that phase of young womanhood, and sometimes, watching her Hispanic students, and the energy they put into their beauty (misplaced, she believed: it would bring them harm), Joan nevertheless understood their joy and their absorption, because she had been joyous and absorbed herself—though she had wanted to make things happen, to change the way the world worked.

All the sisters she lived with had the same sense of absorption. Rocky, who had been called Sister Rosanna, ran a

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Sister Joan would have said that her daily half hour of prayer
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halfway house for schizophrenics and was now involved in fighting the neighborhood in Queens where the house was located. "They want us out," she said, always referring to herself and the psychotics as "us"—believing, Joan understood, that they were virtually indistinguishable. Four days a week Rocky lived in the halfway house; the remaining three days she joined Joan and two other sisters—Marlene, who directed a homeless shelter, and Philida, who was the pastoral counselor at a nursing home. They shared a large apartment—owned by the order—on Fiftieth Street and Eighth Avenue. They had easy relations with the neighborhood

prostitutes and drug dealers, who were thrilled to find that these people, whom they called "sister," seemed to have no interest in making them change their ways.

They could have been almost any group of middle-aged, unmarried women who made their living at idealistic but low-paying jobs and had to share lodgings if they wanted to live in Manhattan, housing costs being what they were. But at the center of each of their days was a half hour of prayer and meditation, led in turn by one of the four of them. They read the Gospel of the day and the Old Testament Scriptures; they spoke of their responses, although they didn't speak of

either the texts or their thoughts about them once they had left the room they reserved for meditation. This time was for Joan a source of refreshment and a way of making sense of the world. If anyone had asked her (which they wouldn't have; she wasn't the type people came to for spiritual guidance), she would have said that this was why she loved that time and those words: they were the most satisfying consolation she could imagine for a world that was random and violent and endlessly inventive in its cruelty toward the weak.

Unlike the other sisters, including Philida, Joan had always been too thin. When she thought about it, she thought she had probably become stringy, and her skin, which had tanned easily, was probably leathery now. Perhaps her thinness and the coarse texture of her skin were traceable to her anomalous bad habit. Joan was a heavy smoker. She'd begun smoking in graduate school, the education program at the University of Rochester. Her study partners had all smoked, and she had drifted into the habit. She had wanted to persuade them—and herself, perhaps—that they didn't know everything about her just because she was a nun. Nuns didn't smoke; everyone knew that. But Joan did, though she had tried to quit. The women she lived with didn't allow her to smoke in the apartment; they had put a bumper sticker up on the refrigerator that said SMOKE-FREE ZONE. And of course she didn't smoke in school. She went over to the rectory to smoke.

SHE was the principal of Saint Timothy's School, at Forty-eighth Street and Tenth Avenue. Once all Irish, it was now filled with black and Hispanic children. Joan was proud of what Saint Timothy's provided. She knew that she suffered from what one of her spiritual advisers called "the vanity of accomplishment." She knew she had a tendency to believe that she could do anything if people would just go along with her programs, and she made jokes about it, jokes on herself, jokes she didn't really believe. When she made her last retreat, which was run by a Benedictine sister, the nun urged her to contemplate the areas of life that were unsusceptible to human action, the mysterious silences of God, the opportunities for holiness provided by failure. She tried, for a while, to center her meditations the way the Benedictine had suggested, but then concluded that this was a contemplative's self-indulgence; she was in the world, she was doing God's work in the world. There was work to be done, and (was this what she had grown up hearing described as "the sin of pride"?) she could do it. She had long ago given up heroic plans and dreams, but she could make her school run well, and she could give to children—who often didn't have it elsewhere—a place where they were made to feel important, where things were demanded of them, but where they were valued and praised.

Though Joan was frustrated and vexed by the poor quality of many of her teachers, she believed that the children got

from her and her staff a quality of schooling they could never have gotten in the public schools. She came to understand that many of the teachers were at Saint Timothy's because they wouldn't have been tolerated anywhere else. She put up with most of them, because at least they created zones of energy and discipline. She drew the line, though, at Gerard Mahoney. Gerard had been teaching seventh grade at Saint Timothy's since he left his seminary studies, in 1956. Joan was sure he'd been thrown out, not for bad behavior or any spiritual failure but simply because he couldn't make the grade—not then, not in the years when the seminaries were full to overflowing. God knows, she said to herself, nowadays he would probably be ordained. But they'd sent him home, to his mother, who had been the housekeeper at Saint Timothy's since, Joan once speculated to Rocky, Barry Fitzgerald was a curate. Mrs. Mahoney had been there when Steve Costelloe arrived, fresh from the seminary, thirty years earlier. Steve had been the pastor at Saint Timothy's for the past fifteen years. Gerard's mother had died twelve years ago, after a long illness, when Gerard was fifty-two.

Joan and Steve got along, which was more, she thought, than a lot of women in her position could have said. Essentially, Steve was lazy; his saving grace was that he understood it. He was a pale redhead, with freckles under the gold hair that grew on his hands; he was going bald; he had broad shoulders, but then his body dwindled radically—he was hipless, and his legs (she'd seen them when he wore shorts) were hairless and broomstick-thin. He had a little pot—whimsical, like something he carried tucked in his belt, a crystal ball he tapped his fingers on occasionally, as if he were waiting for messages. He was incapable of saying no to people, which was one reason he was universally beloved. Saint Timothy's was a magnet for people who had nowhere else to go; Steve was constantly cooking up vats of chili (his recipe said: "feeds 50–65"), and some unfortunate was always in the kitchen.

Often someone who had no real business being there was found to have moved into one of the spare bedrooms; the rectory, built for the priests, was nearly empty. It housed only Steve and Father Adrian, from the Philippines, who giggled all the time; when faced with the desperate situations of junkies and abused wives, he would say "Pray and have hope," and giggle. Sometimes Joan and Steve said to each other—thinking of the hours they spent counseling people in trouble—that Adrian's approach might be approximately as successful as theirs, considering their rate of recidivism. In the Philippine parade he'd been on a float, playing a martyred Jesuit. His brother, who had contributed to the construction of the float, blamed Father Adrian for their failure to win the prize for best float. "You were laughing when they hanged you," he shouted at his brother. "That's why we didn't win." "I couldn't help it," Father Adrian said, giggling. "The children made me laugh." Steve was happy to have Father Adrian, because he was willing to take the seven o'clock mass, and Steve liked to



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sleep late. Joan suspected that Steve was often hung over. He was in good form by noon, for the larger mass that served the midtown workers, who came to him on their lunch hour and usually, she guessed, went back to work refreshed.

Problems arose when Steve felt that one of the people in the rectory rooms ought to be moving on; then he would come to Joan desperate for help. She would summon the person in question to the office (not in the rectory, of course, but in the school, next door) and speak firmly about getting a hold on life and going forward. Some of them just ignored her, and stayed on until some mysterious impulse sent them elsewhere. But a few of them listened, and that was bad: it encouraged Steve to ask for her help again, and she couldn't say no to his unhappiness; he was as hopeless as a hopeless child. She often said that the one temptation she could not resist was to try to fix something when it seemed broken and she believed she had the right tools. More often than not she felt she did.

Steve was dreadful with money, and a terrible administrator. He was saved by his connections: people he'd met when he played minor-league baseball, or when he sat in the Sky Box at the Meadowlands because someone had given him a Giants ticket, or people whose confessions he had heard on an ocean liner while he was a chaplain on a Caribbean cruise. Once a year Saint Timothy's would have a fundraiser, and somehow he'd be bailed out. He left the administration of the school to Joan, allowing that she was much better at it than he, and saying,

"Just don't get our name in the papers, unless it's for something good." He had no stake in proving himself the boss, and she was grateful for that; when her friends ran into trouble with their pastors, it was because those pastors resented a loss of power. Steve wasn't interested in power; but Joan believed he was genuinely interested in the welfare of his flock. When she was angry at him, because he had foiled her or screwed something up, she thought he was interested only in being universally liked, and that he'd become a priest because it gave him a good excuse for not being deeply engaged with human beings.

In the end he'd backed her up about Gerard, whose shortcomings were impossible to ignore. When she walked down the hall past his classroom, the sounds of chaos came over the frosted-glass pane above the door. She had taken to making random visits; the sight of her in the doorway quieted the kids. Pretending she was in full habit, pretending she was

one of the nuns she'd been taught by, she could stand in a doorway and strike what her mother would have called the fear of God into any class. Even the rowdy seventh-graders—the boys who could have felled her with a punch, the girls who were contemptuous of her failure to get the knack of feminine allure—even they could be silenced and frozen in place by the sight of "Sister" staring down at them, as if from a great, sacral height. It couldn't go on.

She talked to Gerard first. Gerard smoked too, and she saw to it that their cigarette breaks in the rectory coincided. She asked him—gently, she hoped (though she'd been told that she wasn't tactful and lacked subtlety)—if things were going all right in his class. He said, "As well as can be expected." She had to hold her temper. Expected by whom? she wanted to say. She said that keeping order among adolescents was difficult, and if he wanted to brainstorm with her and some of the other teachers, she'd be glad to set something up. Then she

looked into his dull black eyes, eyes that seemed to have been emptied of color and life and movement, and thought that if there was a brain behind them, it, too, would be inert and dull. No storming was possible in or from that particular brain.

She wasn't someone who thought much about people's looks (whether people were good-looking wasn't a judgment she made about them), but Gerard's looks annoyed her. It was as if he had sat passively by and allowed someone to push his face in; the area from his cheekbones to his lower teeth was a dent, a

declivity, a ditch; his lower teeth jutted above his upper ones like a bulldog's. Something about the way his teeth fit made it difficult for him to breathe quietly; he often snorted, and he blew his nose with what Joan thought of as excessive, and therefore irritating, frequency. His ears were two-dimensional and flat, like the plastic ears that came with Mr. Potato Head kits. His clothes were so loose on him that she could not envision the shape of his body. He wore orthopedic shoes, and she imagined that he had a condition no one talked about anymore, something people didn't need to have, which he just held on to out of weakness or inertia. Gerard had flat feet.

He said he was doing just what he'd been doing for forty years, and it seemed to work out all right. He mentioned that one of his earliest pupils was already a grandfather.

She wanted to say to him, What the hell does that have to do with anything? But she was trying to keep in mind what



would be best for the children. She suggested breaking up the class into focus groups; she suggested films and filmstrips; she offered him more time in the computer lab. They didn't actually have a computer lab; it was a room with one computer. But Joan thought that by calling it "the computer lab" she would encourage everyone to take it seriously. Gerard, remarkably, was more skilled with computers than most. She imagined him honing his skills alone in his apartment, the one he'd lived in with his mother, playing game after game of computer solitaire, or computer chess, or some other equally solipsistic and wasteful pastime. To whatever she suggested, he responded, "I guess I'll just go on doing what I've been doing. It seems to work out all right."

SHE was slightly ashamed of her glee when Sonia Martinez, the mother of Tiffany, one of the smartest girls in the seventh grade, came in to complain about Gerard. Sonia Martinez said that the children were learning nothing; that she wanted Tiffany to do well on her exams and get a scholarship to one of the good high schools, Sacred Heart or Marymount; and that Tiffany was going to be behind if she stayed in Gerard's class. She mentioned her tuition payments. You've got to be kidding, Joan wanted to say. Parents paid Saint Timothy's a tenth of what was charged at private schools—less if they were parishioners, which Tiffany's parents were. She didn't like Sonia Martinez, who was finishing a business degree at Hunter College and worked for the telephone company, whose children were immaculately turned out, who was obviously overworked and naturally impatient. But she admired her tenacity, and she knew that Mrs. Martinez was right. Sonia Martinez threatened a petition by the class parents.

"Just wait on that," Joan said. "Give me a little time."

Sonia Martinez trusted her; she said all right, but the semester was ticking on, and the placement exams came early in the fall of the eighth-grade year.

AS Joan walked over to the rectory, she felt the liveliness in her bones. A salty, exciting taste was in her mouth, as if she'd eaten olives or a salad of arugula. She thought that if she tried to run now, she could run easily, and very, very fast. She felt no concern for Gerard; she told herself that his job was no good for him, either, the way things were, and anyway he was sixty-four; the time had come for him to retire. If Catholic schools were going to have credibility, they would have to have standards as high as those of other private schools. They had to get over the habit of thinking of themselves as refuges for people who couldn't make it elsewhere. Anyway, she told herself, I'm doing it for the students. They're my responsibility. My vocation is to serve them.

This is what she said to Steve, who, of course, said she

was overreacting, that Sonia Martinez was overly ambitious, that they had, in charity, to think of their responsibility to Gerard, who had been with the parish all his life.

"So we have to forget our responsibility to the children we are pledged to serve?" she said.

"It's one year of their lives," Steve said. "This school is his whole life. It's all he has."

WHEN she talked it over with her friends, Rocky—who because she dealt with schizophrenics was in an excellent position, she said, to deal with the clergy—suggested that she tell Steve that Gerard probably wasn't happy: dealing with chaotic, aggressive adolescents couldn't be pleasant. Joan should think of something else for him to do.

"What, what can he do?" asked Joan, who was wishing more than ever that their apartment wasn't a smoke-free zone. "He's a complete loser."

"He must be good at something."

"He can't even read the Gospel properly," Joan said. "Didn't you hear him last week—'When Jesus rode on his donkey into Brittany'? You were the one who had to dive under the seat and pretend you were looking for a Kleenex."

"Everybody's good at something. What's he interested in?"

"Smoking."

"Didn't you say he did computers?"

She understood at that moment why people believed so literally in the Holy Ghost, in the purges of fire. A heat came over her head; her own wisdom was visible to her. She would put him in charge of the computer lab. That they had no computer lab was a minor problem. She had been reading about how obsolete computers sat around in offices. She would get Steve to schmooze up his executive friends for donations: Steve would get free lunches, the gift would probably be a tax deduction for them, and they'd think they were buying a few years out of purgatory.

Steve, as she told her friends afterward, fell for the scheme like a ton of bricks. Within a month they had six computers, none of them new but all of them workable. Gerard was more adept at the technology than any other teacher in the school, but so were most of the students. After he'd given the teachers some minor instruction, he had little to do but sit in the corner, watch the teachers and the students work, make sure the switches were turned off at the end of the day, and occasionally dust the keyboards. Everyone was happy—especially Sonia Martinez, who was doing a paper on computer literacy and minority advancement. One of Joan's friends, who taught education at the college run by their order in Brooklyn, was able to pump up one of her students for a stint teaching seventh grade. Joan knew this wouldn't last: the good young teachers left because they could earn more elsewhere, or they got married and then pregnant. But for now things were much better. She hardly

saw Gerard except when their cigarette breaks coincided. When she did, she congratulated him on his new job. He said, "We are all in the hands of the Lord."

She wanted to smack him.

STEVE told her that the parish was going to celebrate Gerard's twenty-fifth anniversary as a deacon.

"What the hell does he do as a deacon anyway?" she said. "Besides mangle the Gospel?"

"He brings communion to the sick, though sometimes he gets lost and wanders around midtown with the Blessed Sacrament. To tell the truth, he doesn't do much. But it means a lot to him. His mother was heartbroken when he was sent down from the seminary. I think the old pastor really pushed for his deaconate. It's a good thing. Or, as my grandmother would have said, 'It does no harm.' And sometimes that's the best you can hope for."

She wanted to say to Steve, *It's the best you can hope for*, but she held her tongue.

"We're going to have a little party. We'll have mass, and then wine and beer and pretzels and chips in the basement. Can you organize the children?"

"To do what?"

"Have them sing something?"

"What do you think this is, *The Sound of Music*?"

"Come on, Joanie, give me a break. I'm stuck with this."

"So I provide the entertainment?"

"Entertainment—you? Do you think I'm crazy? Just the organization. That's more in your line."

Joan was surprised at how much what Steve said hurt her. But she determined to forget it. She asked him who was going to be in charge of the food and the decorations. "Marek," he said. Marek was from Poland; he had been an accountant there, but now he wanted to be an artist. He was living in one of the spare rooms at the rectory. He was supposed to be the sexton, and to do odd repairs, but he was as bad at that as Gerard was at reading the Gospel. She wasn't hopeful about the food and the decorations, but one of the things she had learned was that if she tried to do everything, nothing would get done well. It's not my problem, she said to herself; she would forget about the food, the decorations, what Steve had said to her, and concentrate on the children and their song.

She chose the littlest children, who still loved any excuse to perform. She herself had no musical talent; she had hired Josie Myerson, a niece of one of the sisters, who was getting a Ph.D. in music, to come to the school once a week to do music with the children. The girl was energetic and talented, and what she did, if inadequate in its extent, was at least first-rate in its quality. Josie, who was plain and misunderstood by her mother, looked at Joan with a hopefulness that made Joan uneasy. Soon, she expected, Josie would talk about wanting to enter the convent. Joan would discourage her; Josie was too neurotic, and the last thing the order needed was someone who joined because she couldn't make it in the larger world. But Joan knew how to use her power over

IN THE TUBE

They beat the edge
Of the dawn light,
The pearly pre-glow

Right at their heels,
The three boys
Carrying the fourth

Rolled in a sheet.
They all had taken
Something the night

Before in a beach
House and this one
Drowned in his sleep.

They acted quickly,
These instinctive
Athletes who cross

The faces of tons
Of crushing water
Which refrain

From curling over
And burying them
Alive because they

Are nimble, quick,
Tuned to the wit
Of their survivors'

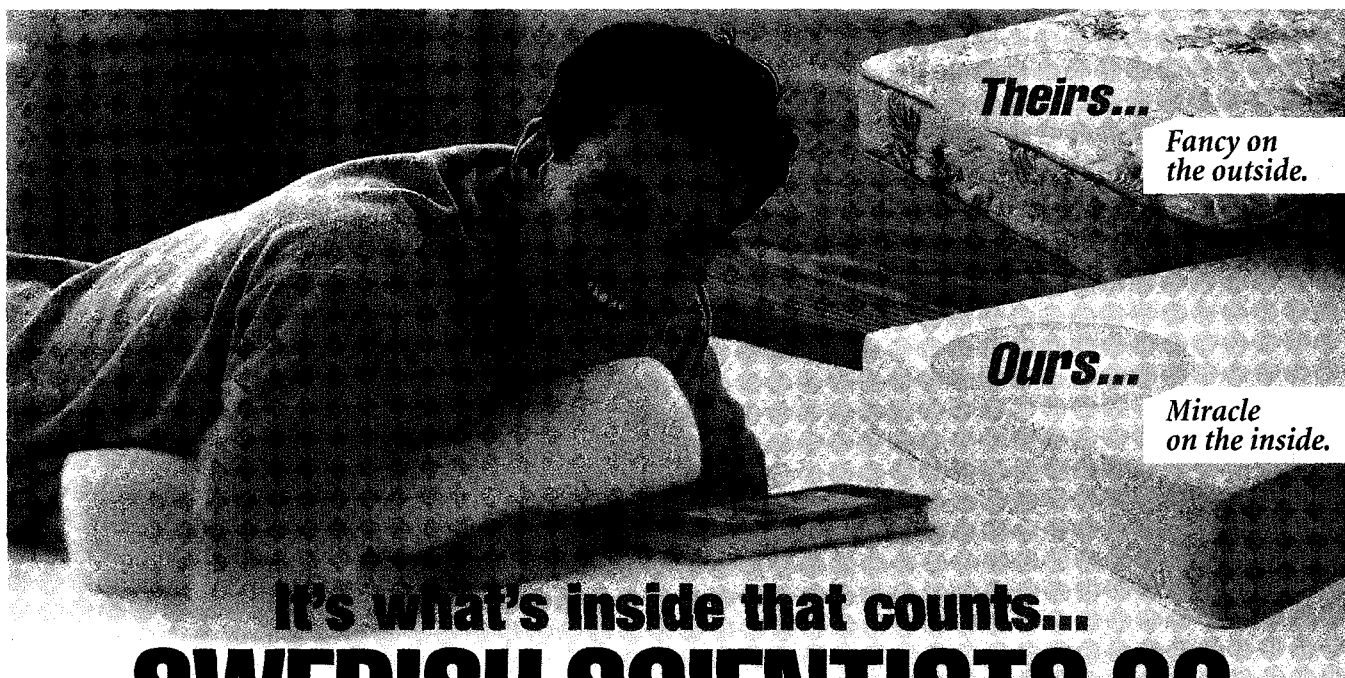
Bodies. They hurried
From the running car
And laid their friend

Like a Sunday paper
On his parents' doorstep,
And drove off to

The place where the sharp
New light would comb through
The wave crests and they

Would ride below them,
Dodging the onrush.

—MARK JARMAN



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Josie when she needed to, and she needed to now. Josie taught six of the girls and six of the boys the song "Memo-ries," from *Cats*, which she thought would be appropriate for a twenty-fifth anniversary. Then they would break into a Latin medley, including dancing, which would make them all happy and lighten the tone.

STEVE announced at the beginning of the mass that it was to be said in thanksgiving for Gerard's ministry. Most people, he said, didn't understand the role of the deacon. He could do all the things a priest did except consecrate the Host. His ministry was in the community, and he was of the community; Gerard certainly was, having lived here, on the same block, all his life. Joan was sure that almost none of the parishioners had any idea who Gerard was, other than that he was funny-looking and often made mistakes in the reading. Nevertheless, they applauded him when Steve called for applause, and because it was a Sunday, enough people were there to make the applause sound genuine and ample.

Just after communion Joan went downstairs to determine where the children should stand; she didn't know where Marek would have put the tables, and how she would accommodate the arrangement. When she turned on the light, her heart sank. Marek had done nothing to make the place festive. On one long table were two boxes of Ritz crackers; a slab of cheddar cheese on a plate; some unseparated slices of Swiss, the paper still between the slices; a plate of dill-pickle spears; a bowl of green olives; two bags of potato chips; and a bag of Chee-tos. There were two half-gallon jugs of red wine, a bottle of club soda, and a bottle of ginger ale. Two dozen paper cups, still in their plastic. A packet of napkins, also wrapped. On the four pillars that supported the ceiling were taped white paper plates with the number 25 written on them in blue ballpoint.

Desperate, Joan ran upstairs to the rectory kitchen for bowls to put the crackers and the chips in. Frantically she unwrapped the paper cups and unwrapped and spread out the napkins. She ran upstairs again for some ice and looked for an ice bucket; unable to find one, she emptied the ice trays into a large yellow bowl. When the children came downstairs, she told them to stand in front of the food table; somehow, she thought, they made the whole thing less dispiriting.

She'd been worried that there wasn't enough food, but only three adults came downstairs from the church: Father Adrian; Lucinda, the Peruvian housekeeper; and Mrs. Frantzen, who had taught in the school until her retirement, fifteen years earlier. Then Steve came downstairs—he was always surrounded after mass, and had a hard time getting away—but said he could stay only a minute. He had a baptism in Westchester—one of the assistant coaches of the Knicks had had a baby, and no one but Steve could baptize her. He

told Gerard he'd take him to Gallagher's for dinner—that he'd be back at five. "You, too, Joan," he said, running out the doorway. "You'll join us too." He didn't wait for a reply.

She told the children they could eat what they wanted, and they dived for the potato chips. Their activity was a welcome spot of color, because no one had anything to say. They kept congratulating Gerard, and saying what a wonderful thing the deaconate was, and how wonderful it was that he had served the parish all these years, in all these ways. No one said what the ways were exactly. Mrs. Frantzen said how proud his dear mother would be. Father Adrian offered a prayer for the repose of Gerard's mother's soul. The children sang their song but skipped the Latin medley. Father Adrian and Lucinda drifted upstairs. Mrs. Frantzen said she'd have to be going.

Gerard lingered while Joan collected the food to take upstairs. She supposed that eventually Marek would get around to it, but she much preferred being busy over trying to think of something to say to Gerard.

"Well, Gerard, it's quite a day for you," she said, with a false brightness that turned her stomach.

"I count my blessings," he said. She could think of nothing else to say. He helped her carry the leftovers up the stairs. She thought of the upcoming dinner at Gallagher's. She thought that Steve had selected the restaurant because the management knew them, and because they could smoke there. She rarely thought about drinking, but she planned that as soon as she sat down, she'd order a Scotch and soda.

WHEN she got to the apartment, the other sisters were watching a video of W. C. Fields's *My Little Chickadee*. She was glad to take her shoes off, settle on the couch, and join the laughter—much too raucous, they said happily, for a bunch of nuns. It was three o'clock. At four she'd have to get ready for dinner, and at four-thirty she'd leave. But she had time to watch the movie. Marlene had made chocolate-chip cookies, and Philida was putting coffee Häagen-Dazs into their blue-and-white ice-cream bowls.

"Now, this is heaven," Rocky said. "Forget eternal light and visions of unending bliss. This is it."

"Ten years in purgatory for blasphemy," Marlene said.

"If only this weren't a smoke-free zone," Joan said.

"If only you weren't trying to kill yourself," Rocky said.

"All right, all right, I'm sorry I brought it up," Joan said. She thought about how Fields's cruelty was delightful, and wondered what it had to do with Gospel generosity, and decided that it had everything and nothing to do with it and she should just relax. She wondered what W. C. Fields would do with Gerard. He certainly wouldn't be going to Gallagher's with him. Or maybe he would. For the steak and the Scotch.

At four-thirty the phone rang. It was Steve, from his car, or from the highway beside his car. He was waiting for a tow truck. He wasn't going to be able to get to the city by five.

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Yale University

They'd have to go on without him; he'd be there as soon as he could.

"Don't do this to me, Steve," Joan said.

"I'm not doing it. It's in the hands of God, Sister."

"God has nothing to do with it. Just get here. Can't one of your rich friends lend you a car?"

"I'm in the middle of the highway. I have to deal with this first."

"Just hurry. Just go as fast as you can."

"Aye, aye, sir," he said, and clicked off.

When she told the other nuns what had happened, Philida was suspicious. "I'll bet he's sitting in someone's rumpus room and just said his car broke down."

"Steve wouldn't lie."

"Steve takes care of Steve."

"And a lot of other people, too. You can't say he's not generous, Philida."

"When it's easy for him."

"I'm just not going to think about it," Joan said, angry at Philida for making things more difficult. "It's impossible enough as it is. Will one of you come with me? Steve'll pay for it. Or probably no one will pay. The people who run Gallagher's are in the parish; Steve probably baptized all their kids."

"Joan, if you had a choice between dinner with Gerard and watching *The African Queen* and ordering in Thai food, which would you choose?" Marlene asked.

"In solidarity with a sister, I'd go to Gallagher's."

"Solidarity is one thing; being out of your mind is another. Offer it up, for the poor souls," Rocky said.

"This is community life? This is my support network?"

"We'll keep the movie out for an extra day, so you can see it tomorrow. The community will pay the late fee."

"That's Christian charity at its most heroic."

"We gave up the virgin-martyr thing years ago, Joan. Hadn't you heard?"

She had what she thought was a brilliant idea. She phoned Gerard and explained what had happened to Steve, and asked if he'd like to put off the dinner until another day, when Steve could join them.

"But then it wouldn't be my anniversary," he said.

"Well, it could still be a celebration."

"This is the day of my anniversary," he said. "No other day will be that."

She gave up. People's wanting something so much often wore her down. She very rarely wanted anything for herself enough to try to force someone into giving it to her. Gerard wanted this, and like a lot of people who had very little else in or on their minds, he had plenty of room for a stubborn will to grow in.

"Great, then I'll meet you at Gallagher's," she said. She couldn't remember when the prospect of anything had made her so sick at heart.

S LABS of beef hung from hooks in the restaurant window. On the pine-paneled walls, behind the red-leather booths, were pictures of New York sporting, political, religious, and show-business figures from the 1890s to the 1950s. Diamond Jim Brady, Fiorello La Guardia, Jack Dempsey, Yogi Berra. Stiff-looking monsignors beside men in fedoras and coats with collars made of beaver or perhaps mink. An age of easy, thoughtless prosperity, a slightly outlaw age, of patronage and conquest and last-minute saves from on high. She thought how odd it was that she liked this place so much, since it had nothing to do with the way she had always lived her life—was the opposite of the way she had lived her life. Yet she didn't feel out of place here; she felt welcomed, as if they had made an exception for her, and she liked the feeling, as she liked the large hunks of bloody meat and the home-fried potatoes and the creamed spinach, more than the Thai food the sisters would be eating, more than the cookies they would devour while they watched the film.

"So, Gerard, it's a great day for you," she said with what she hoped he wouldn't notice was a desperate overbrightness, masking her terror at the fact that after she said this, she would have nothing to say.

"I thank God every day of my life. I count my blessings. Except I have to say I was a little disappointed. None of the old students came. I thought they'd come. The celebration was mentioned in the parish bulletin."

"Oh, Gerard, most of the old students don't live in the parish anymore. And besides, you know how busy people are."

"Still, you'd think at least one of them."

"I'm sure they were at the mass. You know how shy people are to come to anything after mass. Catholics simply weren't brought up to do it."

"I was surprised, though."

He wouldn't let it go. She felt, at the same time, hideously sorry for him and angry that he wouldn't accept the ways out she offered him. Did he have any idea how horribly he had failed as a teacher? Was today the first news of it for him? If it was, her mixture of pity and dislike was even stronger, though equal in its blend.

"I'm surprised Father Steve went off to the baptism. You'd think he could have found a substitute."

"I think it was a very good friend."

"He's known me for years."

"Well, you know Steve, he always thinks he can do everything. I'm sure he'll show up. You know his way of pulling things off in the end."

"It's a very important day to me."

"Of course it is, Gerard, of course."

"It was a great blessing, my being called to the diaconate."

Yes, she wanted to say, a job with so little to it that you couldn't screw it up.

"My mother was very upset when I was sent home from the sem. I just couldn't cut it. The pressure was very tough."

I think these days they'd say I had a nervous breakdown."

Suddenly she wondered if she had to think of him in a new way, as someone with an illness rather than with a series of bad habits. She didn't know which she preferred, which was more hopeless, which less difficult to bear.

"My mother wanted a son as a priest more than anything. All those years being a housekeeper in the rectory. I really disappointed her. I just couldn't cut it."

"I'm sure you were a great comfort to her in her last days."

His dull eyes brightened. "Do you think that's it? Do you think it's the will of God? That I couldn't cut it at the sem

because if I had been a priest, she would have been alone in her last illness?"

"I've heard you were very devoted to her."

"I took care of her for fifteen years. It was a privilege. It was a very special grace."

"Well, then, you see," Joan said, not knowing what she meant at all.

"Still, I was a big disappointment to her. There was no getting around that. And I was disappointed today, that so few people came. Next to my investiture, it was the most important day of my life."



Gerard began to cry. The waiter hovered behind them and then disappeared. Joan wondered what on earth people in the restaurant imagined was going on between them, who people thought they might be to each other—this unfortunate-looking old man and the underdressed old maid across from him.

She tried to give her attention to him, not to think of the waiter or the other diners, not to be mortified at the sight of this man—he was an old man, really—crying, trying to light a cigarette.

“Sometimes I just don’t know what it all means.”

A wave of anger rose up in her. Anger toward Gerard and toward the institution of the Catholic Church. What was it all worth, the piety, the devotion, if it left him crying, struggling helplessly over an ashtray? Seeing life as meaningless. At least it should have provided him with sustenance. He had missed the whole point; he had taken only the stale, un nourishing broken crusts and missed the banquet. She was angry at him for having missed the whole point of Jesus and the Gospels, when he had been surrounded by them every day of his life, and angry at the Church for having done nothing to move him.

“Surely, Gerard, you know that you are greatly beloved.”

He stopped crying and shook his head like a dog who had been fighting and had had a bucket of cold water thrown on him.

“I appreciate that, Sister. I appreciate that very much. That’s why even Father’s not showing up is the will of God, I think. I always thought that of all of them, you were the one who really cared about me.”

She felt sick and helpless. How could she say to him, I wasn’t talking about me, I was talking about God. He was looking down at the tablecloth; his shoulders were relaxed, not hunched and knotted as usual. He lifted his head and gave her a truly happy smile.

“You see, you were the only one who cared enough to notice what I was going through. Everybody just let me go on teaching, doing a terrible job, giving me class after class to screw up. Do you think I liked it in there? I was just afraid of losing my job. It’s all I have, coming to the school.”

“There’s the deaconate—you could make something of that.”

“I’m not very good with people,” he said. “But you figured out what I was good at. You looked at what I was really like. You saw that I had a talent for computers. You paid attention. That’s what caring really means. You were the only one since my mother who cared enough to tell me I had to improve. Everybody else thought I was hopeless. They didn’t want to look at me, just kept me around so I wouldn’t be on their conscience. You really looked, and you found my gift.”

Turning computer switches on and off? she wanted to say. Dusting keyboards? Turning out the lights and locking the door?

“Now I know I have a real place, a place where I’m needed, and it’s all thanks to you. That’s the kind of thing Jesus was talking about.”

Oh, no, Gerard, she wanted to say, oh, no, you’re as wrong as you can be. Jesus was talking about love, an active love that fills the soul and lightens it, that draws people to each other with the warmth of the spirit, that makes them able to be with each other as a brother is with a sister or a mother with her child. Oh, no, Gerard, I do not love you. You are a person I could never love. Never, never, will I feel anything for you when I see you but a wish to flee from your presence. She prayed: *Let me stay at the table. Let me feel happy that I made Gerard happy. Let me not hate him for his foolishness, his misunderstanding, his grotesque misinterpretation of me and the whole world.* She prayed to be able to master the impulse to flee.

But she could not.

“Excuse me,” she said, and ran into the ladies’ room. In the mirror her eyes looked dead and cold to her. She believed what she had said to Gerard, that all human beings were, by virtue of their being human, greatly beloved. But the face she saw in the mirror did not look as if it had ever been beloved, or could ever love.

She looked in the mirror and prayed for strength—not to make herself love Gerard but to sit at the table with him. Only that.

He believed that she loved him. He believed that she had his interest at heart, when all she cared about was keeping him from doing damage to her children, whom she did, truly, love. *Only Steve had prevented her from throwing him out on the street.* Steve, who, she was more sure than ever now, was relaxing in Westchester.

The poor you always have with you. She heard the words of Jesus in her head. And she knew that she would always have Gerard. He was poorer than Estrelita Dominguez, thirteen years old and three months’ pregnant, or LaTrobe Sandford, who might be in jail this time next year.

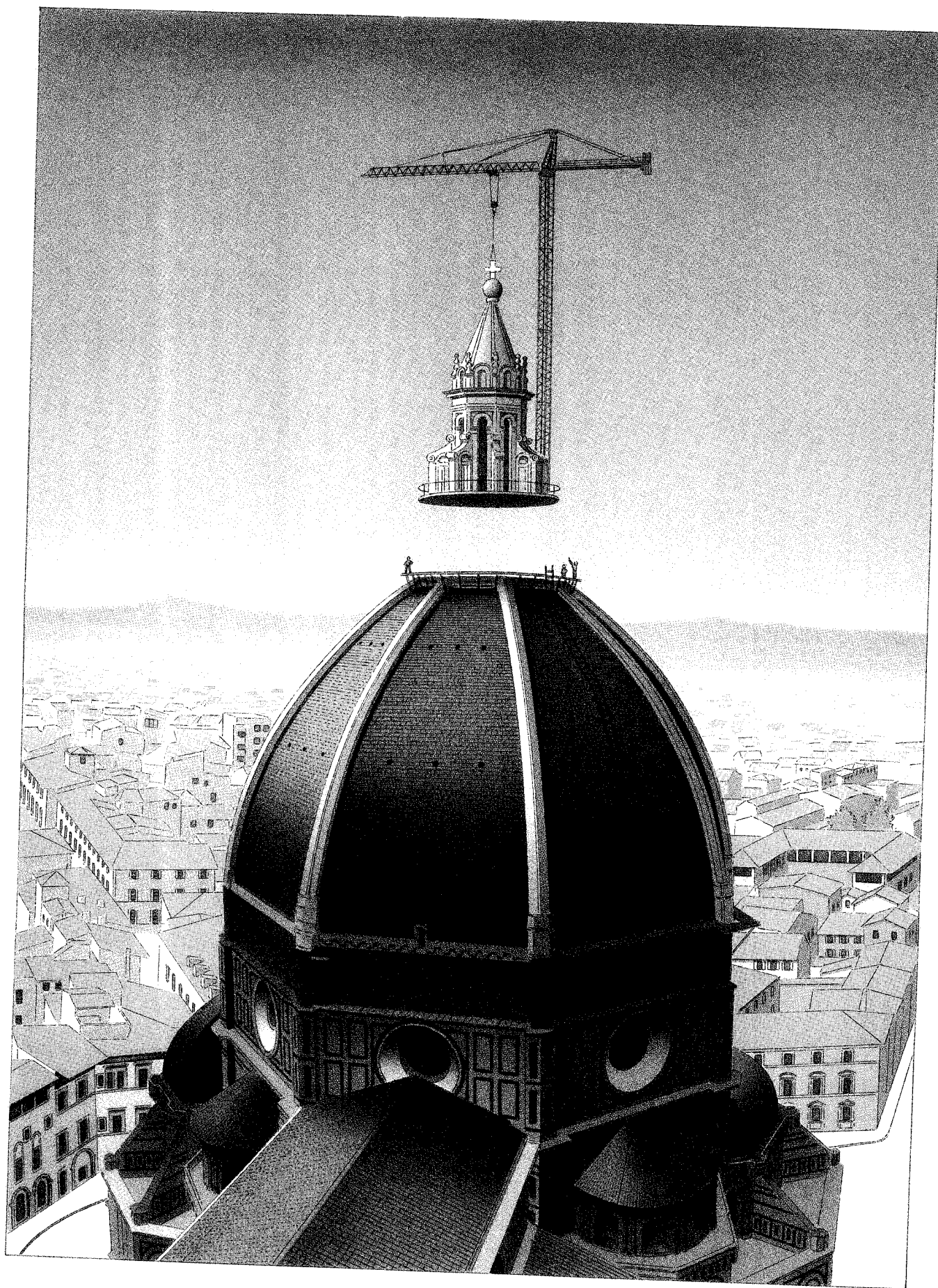
The poor you always have with you. She thought of Magdalene and her tears, of the richness of the jar’s surface and the overwhelming scent of the ointment—*nard* she remembered it’s being called—and the ripples of the flowing hair. She saw her own dry countenance in the greenish bathroom mirror. She combed her hair and smoothed her skirt down over her narrow hips. She returned to Gerard, who had been brought a Scotch and soda by the waiter.

“On the house,” Gerard said. “I told him we were celebrating my anniversary.”

“And you, Sister,” the waiter said. “What can we give you? A ginger ale?”

“Just water, please,” she said. “A lot of ice.”

The waiter was an Irishman; he’d be scandalized by a nun’s ordering Scotch. She didn’t want to disappoint him. ☞





Napoleon in Rags

Bob Dylan changed the popular music of his time and the music that followed, and the commercial release of a formerly bootlegged concert recording shows how he did it

“WISH I was Bob Dylan,” Robert Creeley wrote in the late 1960s, a time when this seemed to be the wish of nearly everybody—including, apparently, anthologized poets whose confinement to print gave them good reason to envy Dylan’s immediacy and perceived social relevance. In the same poem (“In London,” not one of the epigrammatic poems for which Creeley is famous but a series of notebook jottings whose loose

by Francis Davis

tongue seems the result of Dylan’s influence coupled with Allen Ginsberg’s) Creeley also wished he could hear Dylan’s “Tears of Rage” sung by the sweet-er-voiced Joan Baez. This could be taken to mean that Creeley was one of the many who admired Dylan, even during his period of greatest influence and popularity, more as a songwriter than as a performer—more as a voice than as a singer. If so, it hardly amounted to a slight. “He’s got a subtle

mind,” Creeley decided in the poem, for all intents and purposes embracing Dylan as a fellow wordsmith, perhaps even a fellow poet.

I happened upon “In London” while paging through Creeley in search of another poem I recalled reading years ago, which darted to mind as I listened last fall to *Live 1966* (Columbia/Legacy C2K 65759), a concert recording from a period when Dylan stood accused of betraying folk music—and of jeopardizing such folkie ideals as nuclear disarmament and Negro voter registration—for the sin of cupping his hands to his mouth to shout his lyrics above the big bang of a rock-and-roll band at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. Not exactly a new release and not exactly a reissue, *Live 1966* is the first authorized edition of a performance in Manchester, England, that has been obtainable on one bootleg or another almost continuously since at least 1971. The recording location is so frequently misidentified as London’s Royal Albert Hall that Columbia/Legacy has

given its two-disc set the subtitle "The 'Royal Albert Hall' Concert," in an effort to assure potential customers that this is the one they've heard so much about over the years. Like many rock bootlegs of the 1970s, the various pirate editions of Dylan's "Albert Hall" concert were often packaged in plain white sleeves; you knew you had the right show if toward the end, below the hum of the amplifiers and the snarl of Dylan and Robbie Robertson tuning their electric guitars in preparation for "Like a Rolling Stone," you heard an outraged audience member cry "Judas!"

I FOUND the lines from Creeley I was looking for in "After": "I'll not write again/things a young man/thinks, not the words/of that feeling."

The fourth line should be read as "of *that* feeling," because Creeley tends to accent the second word or syllable of a line, like a jazz musician accenting the second and fourth beats of a measure. *That* feeling of what a young man thinks—what I felt in listening to Dylan as a young man—was something I found difficult to recapture in listening to *Live 1966*. To throw one of Dylan's most famous aphorisms back at him, he was so much older then (older than I was, at any rate). He's younger than that now: his recorded voice of thirty-odd years ago sounds almost younger than I can remember ever being.

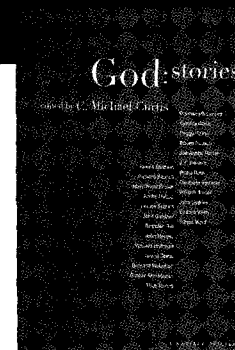
As a college student I was one of those who stayed up late debating the meaning of Dylan's lyrics, as though arguing fine points of Christian theology or of hexagrams from the *I Ching*. In the absence of printed lyric sheets the subject of the debate would sometimes be what his lyrics actually were. I remember that when *John Wesley Harding* was released, an agitated fellow English major spotted me in a classroom and barged right in, interrupting the lecture to ask me what symbolism I found in the trees behind Dylan on the cover. (This same friend was the only person I knew who fell for the canard that smoking banana peels was a cheap, legal high. The last I heard, he was translating French poetry and teaching English.) I also remember thinking even then that the claims for Dylan as not just a poet but *the* poet of the second half of the twentieth century were greatly exaggerated,

and that they ignored the true nature of his impact on American culture as a singer and songwriter—not necessarily lesser crafts.

Dylan obviously saw himself as a poet. He was steeped in poetry, even if when he burst onto the Greenwich Village folk scene in 1961 as a University of Minnesota dropout he tried to give the impression that he was a guitar-slinging Tom Joad whose lyrics spoke the wisdom of the common man. True, Dylan's early topical songs—the ones that got him published in the period's folk bible, *Sing Out!*, and signed by Columbia Records—were diligently modeled on Woody Guthrie. But the wordier songs he soon became identified with, such as "Gates of Eden" and "Desolation Row," with their breath-length measures and apocalyptic imagery, owed more to Allen Ginsberg than to Guthrie or any other folk singer. With these songs—and with "Like a Rolling Stone" and "Subterranean Homesick Blues," in 1965—Dylan put folk music, and then pop, in touch with the bardic strain of one branch of American literature. This strain is usually traced to Walt Whitman, though its actual origins may lie in the sermons of Jonathan Edwards and Cotton Mather, who took it verbatim from the Old Testament. To judge from the striking image of an orphan "crying like a fire in the sun," in "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," Dylan also knew his French Symbolists, and in his 1971 novel *Tarantula* as well as in his song lyrics he often aspired to surrealism. Something about the English language—or perhaps the American character—must be uncondusive to dreaming aloud: like most American writers who have taken a stab at surrealism, Dylan fell victim to logorrhea.

His most glaring weakness as a poet or songwriter, however, was his impiousness, even after he stopped issuing political broadsides. I admit that certain of Dylan's lines have stuck with me over the years; frustrated by work or unfinished business in my personal life, I go to bed at night thinking, "Let me forget about today until tomorrow"—Dylan's prayer for oblivion in "Mr. Tambourine Man." But powerful as they remain, such accusatory songs as "Positively 4th Street," "Ballad of a Thin Man," and "Like a Rolling Stone" might sting more and have greater emotional

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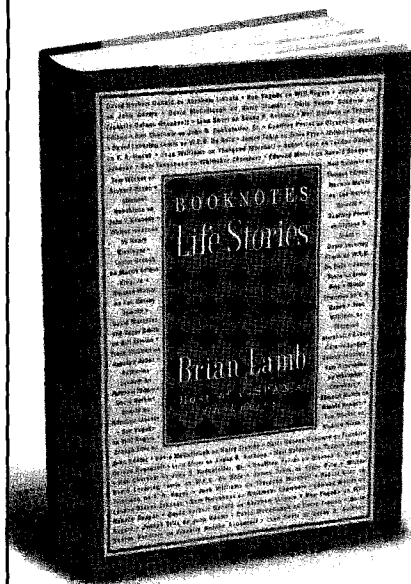
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complexity if one suspected even for a moment that Dylan's putdowns were aimed at himself as well as at his unnamed foes—if, for example, in telling an overly demanding woman that he isn't the man for her in "It Ain't Me, Babe," he sounded as if he wished the opposite were true. "We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry," William Butler Yeats wrote in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*.

Dylan has never been able to tell the difference, and this is his greatest failure both as a songwriter and as a performer.

Just as in the late 1940s some jazz listeners thought Thelonious Monk wasn't a facile enough pianist to do justice to his own compositions, in the 1960s many preferred their Dylan sung by Joan Baez, the Byrds, or even Peter, Paul & Mary. These people objected chiefly to Dylan's unmellifluous voice. But the problem, I think, was something more subjective—something perhaps best illustrated by example. One of Dylan's best songs, and one of only a handful you can whistle, is "Just Like a Woman," from his 1966 album *Blonde on Blonde*. Its stop-and-start melody is a perfect match for its speechlike lyrics about an ex-lover who "takes just like a woman," "makes love just like a woman," and "fake[s] just like a woman" (orgasms?), but "breaks just like a little girl." Predictably, these lyrics earned Dylan a reputation as a misogynist: he delivers them almost too convincingly, his voice dripping disdain for the woman in question, with "her fog, her amphetamine, and her pearls." Sexual politics notwithstanding, it's a great performance. Yet the singer who really did "Just Like a Woman" justice was Van Morrison, who never recorded it for commercial release but frequently performed it in the early 1970s, including as part of the live show captured on the bootleg *Van the Man* (good luck finding a copy).

Morrison, an Irishman whose version of "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," recorded while he was still a member of the group Them, also trumped Dylan's, is a "blacker" singer than Dylan, whose only noticeable debt to black music is a harmonica style derived from Sonny Terry. With his better sense of time and wider expressive range, Morrison transformed "Just Like a Woman" into a soul ballad worthy of Al Green

or James Brown; all that's missing is a horn section. More to the point, Morrison evinces a thwarted need—a hurt and an anger—unavailable to the self-satisfied Dylan. "My weariness amazes me," Dylan tells us in "Mr. Tambourine Man," one of the songs that he performs during his solo acoustic set on *Live 1966*. Everything about himself does, and this has always been to his detriment as an artist.

IT'S difficult not to talk about Dylan mostly in the past tense. In the same way that the blues is black music, rock-and-roll is youth music. Our relationship to what used to be our favorite rock songs changes as we get older, and a rock performer's relationship to his own material also changes. A subtext of Muddy Waters's early records for Chess was what it felt like to be black and poor and a recent arrival in Chicago from Mississippi. Decades later Waters could still perform those songs and similar ones with gusto; the South was far behind him, and he was no longer poor, but he was still black. Dylan and the other pop deities who fashioned a modern sensibility for rock-and-roll in the 1960s, often by striving for a wisdom beyond their years, are no longer young (Dylan is fifty-eight), and the shock of this realization has thrown most of them for a loop.

Middle age has been kinder to Dylan than to, say, Mick Jagger, who should think twice these days before singing "Sympathy for the Devil": younger fans might take him literally when he boasts of having been on hand for the Crucifixion. But Dylan no longer means to people what he once did, and his past dozen or so albums lack intensity, partly because not even his most loyal fans have much invested in him anymore.

Despite his identification with the insurrections of the 1960s, Dylan's appeal cut across ideological lines. In 1997, when he was honored at the Kennedy Center, the only politician who made a bigger fuss over Dylan than Bill Clinton was Newt Gingrich, whose pop futurism and delusions of grandeur as speaker of the House made him seem every bit as much a child of the sixties as Clinton—the confessed adulterer and accused moral relativist whom Pat Robertson once condemned as that decade's "poster boy." Gingrich told reporters,

"The sheer magic, for I think everyone in my generation, is to finally have our nation recognize Bob Dylan."

I doubt that Clinton or Gingrich or other fans still ponder Dylan's supposed meanings. For the past twenty years the only puzzle with each new Dylan album has been whether this serial monotheist is now a Christian or a Jew, and most people I know stopped caring long ago. His 1997 album *Time Out of Mind* was a decent piece of work, but hardly worthy of the nearly unanimous praise it received from rock critics; the notion that it recaptured the Dylan of the 1960s was itself a golden oldie—a tune we'd heard countless times, beginning in 1974 with the release of *Planet Waves*. *Time Out of Mind* won a Grammy as album of the year, but the honor seemed more a lifetime-achievement award, especially since it followed Dylan's hospitalization for a potentially fatal heart infection.

DYLAN'S creative peak lasted only three years, roughly from the Mississippi Freedom Summer to the Summer of Love, or from *Bringing It All Back Home* to *John Wesley Harding*—a period during which rock-and-roll gained intellectual credibility and folk music suffered an irreversible decline, largely as a result of Dylan's strapping on an electric guitar and rejecting the role of pamphleteer. Three years is nothing, yet in this brief span Dylan altered the course of popular music more fundamentally than even Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, or the Beatles. As songwriters, John Lennon and Paul McCartney were surprisingly traditional; they brought a youthful cheekiness to pop, but in terms of lyrical sentiment and melodic structure their songs of the sixties merely updated Tin Pan Alley conventions. Dylan shifted the focus of lyric writing from craftsmanship to self-expression—a concept once as alien to pop as it was to folk, whose modern-day practitioners were encouraged to speak their minds only about pressing social issues.

Folk purists had begun voicing displeasure with Dylan even before he plugged in. At issue was the increasingly personal nature of his lyrics and their diminished social relevance. Irwin Silber, the editor of *Sing Out!* and an

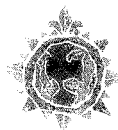
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early Dylan champion, was speaking for many in Greenwich Village folk circles in 1964 when he published an open letter to Dylan in which he argued that whereas “any songwriter who tries to deal honestly with reality in this world is bound to write ‘protest’ songs,” Dylan’s were becoming “all inner-directed now, inner-probing, self-conscious—maybe even a little maudlin or a little cruel on occasion.”

Dylan issued no rebuttals, except in the form of “Positively 4th Street,” a song from *Highway 61 Revisited* that begins “You’ve got a lot of nerve to say you are my friend” and that Dylanologists have always believed targeted Silber. Nevertheless, the victor was the songwriter Silber believed was not living up to his responsibilities as a people’s troubadour. By 1964 “folk” music, as Silber and other veterans of political struggles of the 1930s and 1940s understood it, was a dying form—a casualty of mass technology which had been only briefly revitalized by young performers who, like Dylan, embraced folk less out of any abiding interest in it than out of a commitment to a progressive social agenda. These were people in their early twenties, Dylan included, who had spent their teenage years singing along to Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly records; for many of them folk music amounted to a way of showing leftist elders like Silber and Pete Seeger how grown-up they were. Once the Beatles made it respectable for adults to like rock-and-roll, it was inevitable that Dylan would change his tune, having been a member of teenage rock bands in his native Minnesota and (as “Elston Gunn,” with three *ns*) having once talked his way into a job playing piano and singing for the Shadows, the backup band for the Holly-influenced teen idol Bobby Vee.

Some thirty years after Dylan’s defection, “folk” no longer means traditional ballads and workers’ songs. If it is still understood to mean anything, it means a sensitive young guy or girl with a guitar performing his or her own introspective songs. Folk music has become a pop subgenre, a style appropriated by unlikely advertisers. Dow Chemical, once a target of protests for manufacturing napalm and now a sponsor of *This Week With Sam Donaldson*

and Cokie Roberts, airs spots featuring a man or woman singing about “what good thinking can do” as though leading a hootenanny; you half expect Sam and Cokie, William Kristol, and the two Georges to come back from the break singing along.

Folk would probably have undergone this transformation even without Dylan. But rock-and-roll would not be the same had he not transformed it into a vehicle for creative writing. In a way, rock’s evolution in the 1960s was similar to that of swing twenty years earlier. Some of the youngsters of the 1940s who did the lindy to the big bands eventually stopped dancing and began to crowd the bandstand—the boys to concentrate on the virtuoso instrumentalists, the girls to get a closer look at the dreamy singers. In the sixties the boys still moved close to the stage to watch the soloists (likely to be guitarists rather than saxophonists or trumpeters), but now girls and boys alike paid rapt attention to the lyrics.

Songwriters everywhere sought to emulate this “Napoleon in rags and the language that he’d use,” to quote a line from “Like a Rolling Stone” in which I’m reasonably sure Dylan was describing himself. The first of pop’s major figures to try doing it Dylan’s way was John Lennon, who started opening himself up more in his lyrics (far more than the guarded Dylan ever did) around the time the Beatles recorded the songs for the movie *Help!* With typical candor Lennon admitted Dylan’s influence in a *Rolling Stone* interview, in which he dismissed his own early lyrics as those of “a stylized songwriter” who saved most literary and personal thoughts for “me books”—*In His Own Write* and *A Spaniard in the Works*. Lennon even briefly took to wearing a railroad cap, like the one Dylan had worn on the cover of his first album. Though black audiences showed little interest in Dylan, black artists felt his influence: in addition to recording the definitive interpretation of Dylan’s “All Along the Watchtower,” Jimi Hendrix wore his hair like Dylan’s, in a cumulus of tendrils that was only incidentally an Afro. Even Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones began to cultivate a hitherto unsuspected poetic streak.

By 1967 the lead singers in anonymous bar bands had begun to imitate

Dylan as slavishly as they had copied Jagger only a year or so before—this time under the delusion of creativity rather than in a parasitic bid for sex appeal. Well into the 1970s, despite Dylan’s waning cultural significance, record companies continued to position each new discovery whose songs were literate or just wordy as the new Dylan; among the performers initially burdened with this label were John Prine, Loudon Wainwright III, and Bruce Springsteen. Each eventually asserted his individuality, though audiences might not have known what to make of them without Dylan’s prior example; Springsteen became famous for reasserting the element of social protest that Dylan had abandoned. Dylan’s success also opened the door to a recording career for Leonard Cohen, a published poet whose prior credentials included several books of verse and two inscrutable novels. We have Dylan to thank for Patti Smith and Neil Young, and to blame for Janis Ian and Billy Joel.

There was no rock style of the late sixties or early seventies that Dylan didn’t touch in some way, no matter how alien its aesthetic might have seemed to him. This includes even “glam” rock: on his 1971 breakthrough album *Hunky Dory*, David Bowie dedicated a song to Dylan, and Ian Hunter, the lead singer of Mott the Hoople, added his British accent to Dylan’s hip sneer. Dylan’s influence on pop has been so fundamental that it has never really diminished, just become indirect. It extends to countless performers who might not recognize him as an inspiration, and who might believe his music to be irrelevant to theirs for reasons of age, race, or sex. The late Kurt Cobain and Tupac Shakur were Dylan’s offspring, and so are Jewel, Fiona Apple, and Alanis Morissette.

ON *Live 1966*, as on the studio albums from the same period, the excitement is in hearing Dylan bend the rules of pop to his own will. In effect, the original bootleg of Dylan’s “Albert Hall” concert was a follow-up to *Great White Wonder*, a bootleg double LP from 1969 that had caused a stir by allowing Dylan fans to judge for themselves the merits of his 1967 “basement tapes”—a collection of new songs he had recorded informally while recover-

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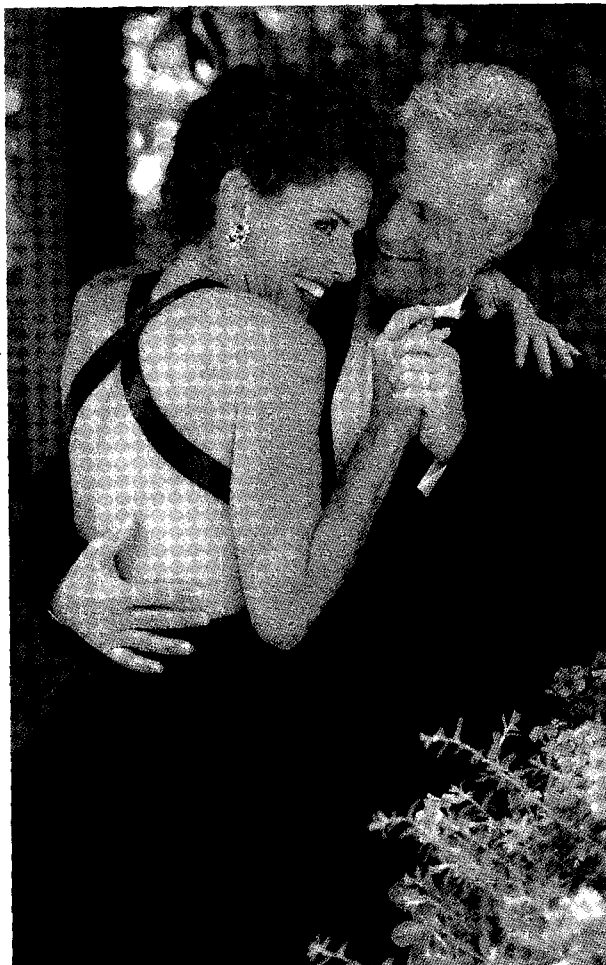
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ing from a motorcycle accident but had decided not to release. The songs themselves were already well known through cover versions by other artists; Manfred Mann had a hit with "Mighty Quinn (Quinn the Eskimo)," for example, and Julie Driscoll and Brian Auger's version of "This Wheel's on Fire" was an FM favorite. But Dylan fans wanted to hear *his* interpretations. This desire intensified in 1968, following the release of *Music From Big Pink*, the first album by the Band, a quintet of formerly anonymous rock-and-roll journeymen—the guitarist Robbie Robertson, the pianist Richard Manuel, the organist Garth Hudson, the bassist Rick Danko, and the drummer Levon Helm—who had forged an identity while serving as Dylan's backup band and had collaborated with him on the basement tapes (actually recorded in the Band's communal home near Woodstock, New York). *Music From Big Pink* included three of the basement Dylan songs, further whetting the appetite for Dylan and the Band's original versions.

The music was worth bootlegging. It was the finest of Dylan's career. Dylan had performed solo on his British tour of 1965, the subject of—or at least the setting for—D. A. Pennebaker's cinema verité-style portrait of Dylan, *Don't Look Back*. One of my favorite scenes from Pennebaker's movie shows a British journalist dictating his review of a Dylan concert into a pay phone and concluding with what he clearly thinks is a poetic flourish of his own: "The times, they are a-changing," sings Dylan. They are, when a poet and not a pop singer fills a hall."

In 1966 Dylan may still have fancied himself a poet, but he was by then also unambiguously a rock-and-roller, thanks in no small measure to the company he had chosen to keep. These were musicians with an encyclopedic repertoire of riffs, veterans of countless one-nighters backing singers far less "poetic" than Dylan. They roughed him up, and he gave back as good as he got, sounding as though he might sing himself hoarse. On some of Dylan's earlier "folk" songs on *Live 1966*, such as "One Too Many Mornings" and "I Don't Believe You (She Acts Like We Never Have Met)," his bandmates frequently sound two notes away from Chuck

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Berry's "Memphis" or Tommy Tucker's "Hi-Heel Sneakers," and this is all to the good. Playing the role of barroom rocker and functioning as one musician among six discouraged Dylan from indulging in the sort of self-conscious preening he did far too much of in his opening solo set, in which the main point of interest (for me, anyway) is his atmospheric and doggedly idiosyncratic harmonica. He was at his most playful on "Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat," essentially a talking blues whose leering non sequiturs, delivered over a shuffle beat, freed him from the requirements of narrative, and also from his usual pretensions to larger social significance.

Dylan was smart enough to realize that the verbal complexity of his lyrics was best offset by a comparable sonic density, which only a rock-and-roll band could provide. But not all the credit for the success of this music as music belongs to his sidemen. As the Band, these same men demonstrated the limits of utilitarian musicianship. The brand of roots-rock Americana they introduced on *Music From Big Pink* amounted to an artistic vision, but as singers and even as instrumental soloists they lacked personality—a quality Dylan always had in abundance, whatever one thought of it. On *Live 1966* his overweening pride for once becomes a virtue: this is a young man meeting rock-and-roll head on, confident that rock-and-roll stands to gain from the encounter. "It used t' be like that, and now it goes like this," he says in introducing a revved-up version of "I Don't Believe You." He might just as well have been talking about rock-and-roll, which had never before been so raw and unregimented.

DYLAN was a new breed of pop star. Elvis Presley loved show business, and so did the Beatles—though their affection was for British music hall and *The Goon Show*, not Las Vegas or fifties network variety shows. Dylan, who was as much a product of 1960s Greenwich Village as of his native Hibbing, Minnesota, saw rock-and-roll less as an extension of show business than as a form of absurdist theater. On *Live 1966* the British folkies dramatize their displeasure by stomping their feet between songs. When someone yells "Judas!," Dylan, in his best halting James

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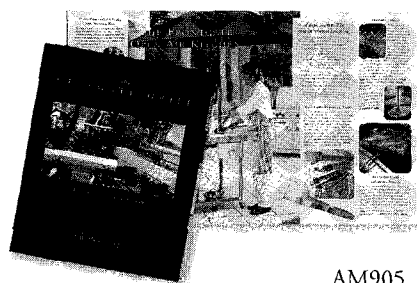
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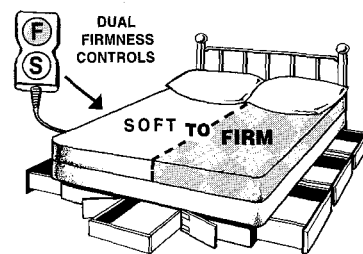
Dean, retorts "I don't believe you," and then "You're a liar," before telling his sidemen (off-mike but clearly audible, and clearly meant to be overheard) to "play fuckin' loud."

To me, what is remarkable about this exchange is that Dylan's speaking voice sounds like someone else's—and might have been someone else's, according to Dylanologists. This ambiguity is one of the reasons the former Robert Zimmerman has been an enigma to even his most obsessive fans. It's been said over and over that Dylan is the guy who made it okay for any songwriter to sing his own songs, no matter how unlovely or technically restricted his voice might be. This is true as far as it goes, but the irony is that Dylan himself has never been a casual singer; he has never even settled on one voice. Early on, a writer observed that Dylan talked like Marlon Brando "imitating [a] Southern farmhand." This also describes his early singing style. On going electric he became, in the words of another writer, "a Rolling Stone singing Immanuel Kant." On *Time Out of Mind*, as on most of his recent albums, he frequently sounds like Gabby Hayes doing Bob Dylan for the amusement of the other cowpokes around the campfire. In this respect John Lennon was Dylan's exact opposite: no matter how often he attempted to reinvent himself, through transcendental meditation or primal-scream therapy or political consciousness-raising, Lennon was always identifiably himself.

Singing was for Lennon a form of self-revelation; for Dylan it has always been an act of self-concealment, which apparently doesn't end when the show does. In *Eat the Document*, a film of Dylan's 1966 European tour made for American television but rejected (it was shown last year at the Museum of Television & Radio, in New York), an interviewer who has had enough of Dylan's put-ons and putdowns asks him, "Don't you ever come offstage? Are you ever yourself at any time?" Dylan has no answer for the interviewer—at least not that we hear.

To many of Dylan's most ardent fans his profanity at the Manchester concert (assuming that he was the one who instructed the musicians to crank up the volume and not Robbie Robertson, as many people, including me, believe) is

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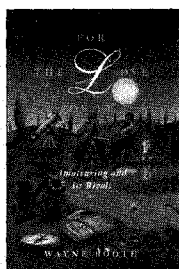
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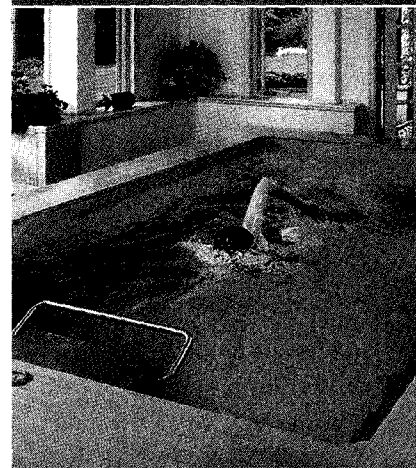
the stuff of high drama—the beginning of an era in pop music when performers would, just like real artists, refuse to let themselves be defined by their audiences. Those fans hear the version of "Like a Rolling Stone" that ends *Live 1966* as an act of brave retaliation: in the words of Corey Greenberg, reviewing *Live 1966* in *Stereo Review*, what follows the instruction to Dylan's sidemen to turn up their amps is "either Lee Harvey Oswald's bolt-action rifle cracking across Dealey Plaza or drummer Mickey Jones's apocalyptic rim shot that kicks off the loudest, meanest, most awe-inspiring version of 'Like a Rolling Stone' Dylan or anyone else has ever laid down."

The allusion to Oswald is tasteless, the hyperbole may be adolescent, and anyone who thinks Dylan or Robertson needed to be provoked to utter a swearword hasn't spent much time around young musicians. Reading Greenberg underscores how very 1960s this music, and the controversy that once surrounded it, now seems.

THE current vogue for everything pertaining to the Second World War—from swing dancing to *Saving Private Ryan* to Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation*—has, in addition to mythologizing our dying parents, been interpreted as a rebuke to a generation that supposedly took democracy for granted and chose in large numbers to protest a war rather than fight in it. But democracy as we define it today is as much the result of battles fought in America's classrooms and streets in the 1960s as of battles fought overseas twenty years earlier. The sixteen House Judiciary Committee Democrats who voted as a bloc against impeaching Bill Clinton included three women, five African-Americans, and one openly gay man—a representation that would have been unthinkable at the time of Iwo Jima or Normandy.

Perhaps none of this has much to do with Dylan, yet it goes a long way toward explaining why his music and that of others in the 1960s holds greater than nostalgic fascination for those of us who grew up with it (and in some ways long ago outgrew it). Whatever was at issue in the music for its original fans remains at issue, however irrelevant Dylan himself has become. ☼

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AMERICANS scarcely marked the eightieth Armistice Day, this past November 11. But standing with stricken faces before the Cenotaph at Whitehall and the Ossuaire at Verdun, and tolling bells in the gloomy villages of Lancashire and the Pas-de-Calais, the British and the French, our erstwhile co-belligerents, mourned as if freshly wounded. For them the Great War is not yet merely history.

In this way, among others, the Oxford historian Niall Ferguson's *The Pity of War* is a very British book. Although Ferguson is young, clever, and ironic, there is nothing cool or dispassionate about his view of the war. The underlying and animating emotion in his book is profound regret. "The First World War," he states up front, "remains the worst thing the people of my country have ever had to endure." Although his rich and provocative book argues many—too many—disparate points, its fundamental argument is that (a) the war was a uniquely terrible event for Britain, and therefore (b) Britain should never have fought it, since (c) the stakes involved were for the British not high. The first assertion is close to indisputable. The second is highly defensible. But the third evades the difficult and tragic aspects of Britain's experience in the Great War.

In 1929 Virginia Woolf described an Oxbridge luncheon party at which, despite notable food and scintillating conversation, she was overcome by a sense of something missing.



OVER THE TOP, JOHN NASH, 1918

But what was lacking, what was different, I asked myself, listening to the talk. And to answer that question I had to think myself out of the room, back into the past, before the war indeed, and to set before my eyes the model of another luncheon party held in rooms not very far distant from these; but different. Everything was different.

"The Great War," used interchangeably with "the First World War" (so named in 1918 by a sardonic English journalist, who knew it would not be the last such conflict), engendered in Britain a sense of loss that endures to this day; it remains the great divide in Britons' sense of their history. Along with the battles of Mons, Loos, the Somme, Ypres, and Passchendaele, and the writings of Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, and Edmund Blunden,

the statistics are probably known to every sixth-former in the United Kingdom: the 60 percent casualty rate that tore apart the British Expeditionary Force (probably the best army Britain ever fielded) in the first three months of the war, the 60,000 casualties on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the 723,000 British dead by the end of the war (twice as many as in the Second World War).

Although evocative and heartbreaking, this litany doesn't tell the full story. The war poets' perspective, for example, was hardly representative. (As the historian Correlli Barnett has argued, much of their revulsion was provoked by the squalor of daily life in the trenches, conditions that the common British soldier from the slums of Leeds, Liverpool, or London would not have

found particularly noteworthy.) Nor were the death and mutilation spread evenly through British society. Although the majority of the British dead came from the working class, officers, drawn mostly from the upper classes, paid a disproportionately high price: for mobilized men overall the death rate was about 12 percent, but for graduates of Oxford and members of the peerage it was 19 percent, and for graduates of the fifty-three boarding schools where statistics are available it was 20 percent. Not since the Wars of the Roses had the aristocracy suffered such losses. The tiny, intimate world of the British elite—members of which composed Woolf's social and intellectual circle, and largely determined how future readers would think about the war—truly lost a generation, and, not surprisingly, it assumed that the country as a whole was similarly devastated.

Britain's horrendous losses were not extraordinary. Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, France, and Turkey each lost far more lives. Moreover, as dreadful as was Britain's experience, "the disturbing paradox" of the Great War was, according to the historian J. M. Winter, that it was at once "an event of unparalleled carnage and suffering and the occasion of a significant improvement in the life expectancy of the civilian population, and especially of the worst-off sections of British society." Thanks to unprecedented government interference in the wartime economy, wages among the poorest groups in Britain rose significantly, and wealth was effectively redistributed. And because of the economic, social, and political forces the war produced, the kind of poverty endemic in pre-1914 Britain—which gave British males almost the same life expectancy as that which Ecuadorians had in the early 1960s—never recurred.

Yet if Britain's experience in the Great War was more complex than the popular mythology would have it, that experience was nevertheless just as crippling as Ferguson maintains—albeit as much for subjective and psychological reasons as for objective ones. The war is Britain's national trauma, and British and Commonwealth historians compulsively revisit it in the way that American historians revisit the Civil War. The results have been glorious. Few other ar-

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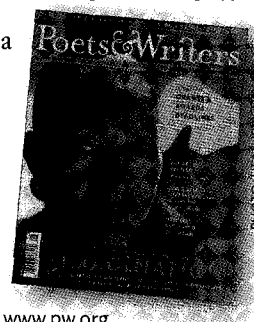
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eas of British historical scholarship have inspired works of such range and quality. Ferguson, like most of his fellows, writes with verve and flair, with a sharp eye for detail and a blind eye to narrow specialization.

A number of military historians have searingly elucidated the awful conditions and calculus of combat. Other scholars have inventively fused economic, military, and diplomatic history. And still others—Winter, Barnett, Modris Eksteins, and Trevor Wilson, for instance—have synthesized such seemingly unrelated fields as education, industry, and literature, or demography and military tactics, or economics and art, or sociology and politics, to produce breathtakingly broad histories. Perhaps the most successful of these, Wilson's aptly titled *The Myriad Faces of War* (1986), embraces in its densely packed pages nearly the totality of the experience of the

metrically opposed. To appreciate the nature of their differences, though, an American has to know something about the essential divide between contemporary British historians and British readers in how they think about the war.

FUTILE is the word that best describes the judgment presented to the British public regarding the First World War. From the war memoirs of the 1920s and 1930s to A.J.P. Taylor's illustrated history of the war (almost certainly the most popular chronicle of the conflict) to the recent novels of Pat Barker and Sebastian Faulks (and from the 1929 play *Journey's End* to the 1963 play *Oh! What a Lovely War* to the 1981 movie *Gallipoli*), the Great War has been portrayed as a meaningless and unnecessary slaughter, led by stupid generals and feckless politicians. Reviewing a war memoir in 1920, one critic plaintive-

explanations and justifications of British military and civilian leaders during the conflict, have discerned "the Cause": Britain fought to forestall a German bid for the mastery of Europe—an essential threat to Britain's national security and political independence. This view has largely failed to penetrate the popular mind, however, probably because the disillusionment of anti-war memoirs is so deeply embedded in the British psyche, and because the British public remains so overwhelmed by the price the war exacted. (Thus, for instance, as long ago as 1964 the BBC showed a lengthy documentary that basically argued that although terrible, the Great War was a "necessary war." Britons' response to the twenty-six episodes of battlescape, however, was to describe the war using the very terms—"needless slaughter," "dreadful waste"—the documentary had attempted to refute.) Oddly, then, Ferguson has self-consciously written an iconoclastic book that attempts to tear down the prevailing scholarly view, but in the public's understanding he batters down a door already open.

Wilson stated his position clearly at the outset of his book: "Britain's involvement in the Great War was not some deplorable accident. Nor was it a malevolent deed clandestinely accomplished by home-grown plutocrats and diplomats." "The conflict," he explained, "was about preserving Britain as a major, and even as an independent, power." In opposition, Ferguson opens *The Pity of War* by declaring,

The fundamental question this book seeks to answer . . . is . . . what were all these deaths . . . really worth? . . . To be precise: Was Britain truly confronted by such a threat to her security in 1914 that it was necessary to send millions of raw recruits across the Channel . . . ? What exactly was it that the German government sought to achieve?

To Ferguson, the answer is obvious: Britain's intervention in 1914 was "nothing less than the greatest error of modern history," because Germany in fact did not pose an essential threat to British interests. So Ferguson indicts London, because "it was the British government which ultimately decided to turn the continental war into a world war, a conflict which lasted twice as long [as] and



TRAVOYS ARRIVING WITH WOUNDED AT A DRESSING STATION
AT SMOL, MACEDONIA, SEPTEMBER 1916, SIR STANLEY SPENCER, 1919

British state and people during the Great War, and is perhaps the closest thing to a complete historical synthesis ever written of any war. Ferguson, too, takes a broad approach, and his book—which has aroused enormous controversy in Britain since its publication there last year—seems to me an implicit response to Wilson's, for their basic arguments are dia-

ly sought some purpose behind the conflict: "Nowhere will you find a period or a sentence of which you could say, 'There! that is what we fought for!' The Cause finds no expression." But in fact since the late 1960s (when, not coincidentally, official records concerning the war were first made available to scholars) most British historians, echoing the

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cost many more lives" than it would have if only Britain had not stepped in the way.

At one level this is a difficult argument to make. Consensus among historians is rare, especially regarding the origins of the First World War, the search for which has swelled into one of the largest investigations into any historical subject. Nevertheless, historians do now generally agree that, as Ferguson acknowledges, Germany "forced the conti-

ental war of 1914 upon an unwilling France (and a not so unwilling Russia)." The notion, advanced by the German historian Fritz Fischer and some of his protégés, that there wasn't much difference between the war aims of Wilhelmine and of Nazi Germany remains controversial. It's clear, however, that at least after the war began, German plans effectively called for (along with the subjugation of much of Eastern Europe and Russia) the permanent subjugation of France, the transformation of Belgium into a "vassal state," and the German navy's taking of French and Belgian Channel ports to use as bases—actions that would certainly threaten Britain's naval security, as Ferguson readily concedes.

The questions historians now debate are Why did Germany essentially force a war in 1914? and Why did it pursue such ambitious war aims? Some, including Ferguson, point to Berlin's deep-seated anxiety about Russia's rapid industrialization and growing military power, and thus see German actions as an attempt to pre-empt Germany's strategic deterioration relative to Russia. They further point to the belief, shared by many Germans, that the balance among the great powers of Europe—the crux of the diplomacy of the past two centuries—was giving way



LA MITRAILLEUSE (THE MACHINE GUN),
C.R.W. NEVINSON, 1915

to one among "world powers." In this emerging pattern only the British Empire, Russia, and the United States had the natural resources, population, and industrial capacity for an assured position in the front rank. For this reason, so the argument goes, Berlin pursued a comparable concentration of power through the destruction of its European rivals' independence and through arrangements that would guarantee to German industry a continental market and a raw-materials base. In short, the goal was, in the words of the historian Imanuel Geiss, whom Ferguson quotes approvingly, "German leadership over a united Europe in order to brave the coming giant economic and political power blocs."

From this tenable if disputable assessment of German ambitions Ferguson builds his case that British policy was terribly, tragically misguided. Ferguson's interpretation of that policy, however, is usually simplistic and often clumsy. Central to his argument is the assertion that the causes to which other historians have ascribed the Anglo-German antagonism in the years leading up to the war—imperial and economic rivalry and Germany's naval buildup—did not menace the British. But this refutes an argument that historians don't make. In fact the

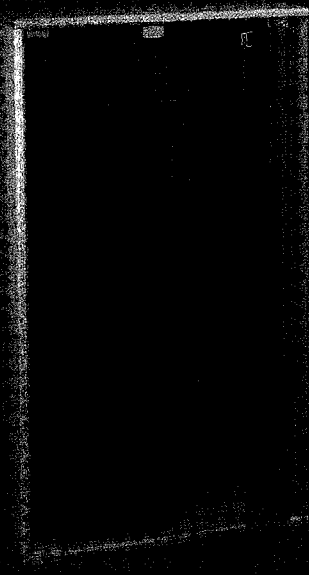
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British were often untroubled by German imperial expansion, since, as Winston Churchill argued in 1912, "we should be rather glad to see what is now concentrated [in the middle of Europe] dissipated [overseas]." London's anxiety about German imperial policy arose not because that policy posed a direct and unambiguous threat to Britain's colonial interests but because of the shrill and aggressive tone in which it was expressed. In its foreign policy Germany seemed, if not a definite menace, something resembling an increasingly powerful, at times sullen, at times boastful teenager; even the German chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, described his country's international behavior as "strident, pushing, elbowing, overbearing." This restlessness was bound to make the British nervous, especially since it was exasperatingly unclear just what would assuage an increasingly petulant Berlin.

No such mystery surrounded Germany's naval expansion. Germany's naval rivalry with Britain demonstrated the fundamental incompatibility of the two countries' interests and aims. By 1910 Germany's was the largest navy in the world after Britain's, and it was built as an offensive force with solely Britain in mind as its opponent. A rising world power, Germany understandably didn't wish to have its expanding overseas trade dependent on the good will of Britain, which by an accident of geography commanded the maritime approaches to Germany. For Britain's part, its foreign policy had long included the axiom that national security depended on its command of the English Channel and the North Sea. In other words, what one power wanted, the other would never voluntarily concede. So although by 1912 the British felt sure that they had, at least in the near term, won the naval race, they had come to believe, as the diplomat Sir Eyre Crowe put it, that "the building of the German fleet is but one of the symptoms of the disease. It is the political ambitions of the German Government and nation which are the source of the mischief."

This conclusion was hardly unreasonable from London's point of view. Although at first Britain saw a German "threat" in the narrow terms of a naval rivalry, that rivalry provoked British statesmen and military planners to pay

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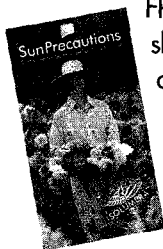
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closer attention to the geopolitical consequences of Germany's booming population and industry and its military power. London feared that were Germany to dominate France, through either political intimidation or military conquest, the resulting increase in its economic strength would permit it to out-build the British navy. And a greatly enlarged German navy, with access both to the North Sea and to French ports, could strangle Britain.

CITING the pace of Russian industrialization and strategic railway construction and the size of Russia's army (while neglecting to emphasize how ill-trained that mass of peasant conscripts was), Ferguson asserts that although Britain looked at the Kaiser and saw a latter-day Napoleon, pre-war Germany in fact felt threatened by the czarist colossus and believed that its own relative advantage in Europe was slipping away. Had Britain not suffered from a "Napoleon neurosis" but instead understood the true balance of power on the Continent, Ferguson argues (echoing the complaints of Germany's pre-war statesmen), it would have realized that German ambitions in 1914 were preventive rather than offensive, and didn't call for a British response. This position has some merit. Britain began to focus on the problem of the balance of power when France and Russia were at their weakest, and London was slow to recognize Russia's surprisingly rapid recovery from the disaster of the Russo-Japanese War. Berlin was more perceptive, and certainly there is considerable evidence that German doubt and pessimism about the future gave rise to the Germans' appetite for expansion and subjugation. To this day historians are debating whether, as Crowe framed the issue, Berlin was "definitely aiming at a general political hegemony . . . , threatening the independence of her neighbors and ultimately the existence of England," or whether Berlin's designs were "no more than the expression of a vague, confused and impractical statesmanship not realising its own drift."

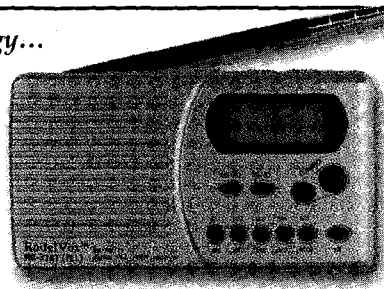
But to Britain, as Crowe argued, the question of German intentions was far less important than the reality of German capabilities. Unlike Ferguson, who too crudely uses total numbers of sol-

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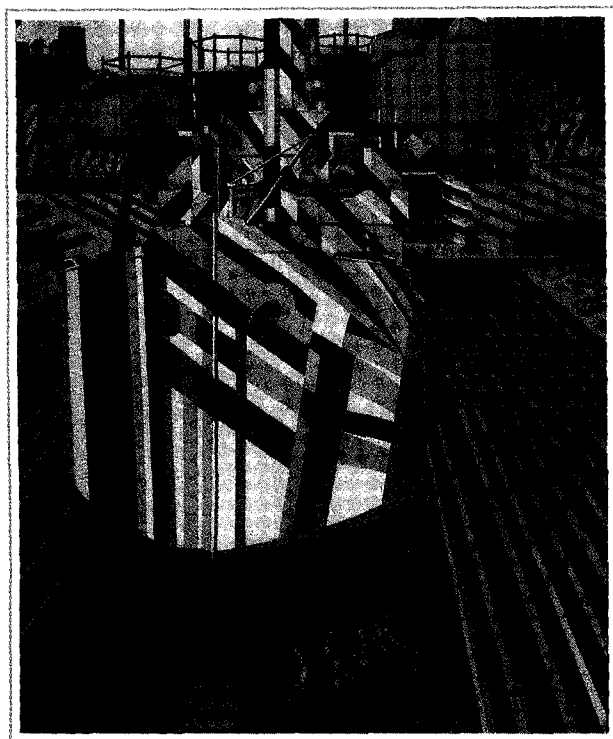
diers as an index of the military balance, British statesmen rightly regarded the German army as the most technologically advanced and tactically innovative in Europe (a judgment that was to prove accurate during the war). However legitimate Berlin's anxiety about the long-term rise of Russian power, London couldn't ignore the fact that Russia's ally, France, would almost certainly be overrun in the event of a Continental war. For sound geopolitical reasons Britain's concern was with Germany's threat to France and Belgium rather than with a potential Russian threat to eastern Prussia. Germany, after all, was only one

would have dispatched their Russian nemesis without provoking war with Britain. No British government would have wished to go—or, given public opinion, could have gone—to war with the Central Powers to maintain some distant and obscure borders in Eastern Europe.

Finally, however much Germany may have “acted out of a sense of weakness” in 1914, as Ferguson maintains, British fears of German power on the Continent and what that implied for Britain's security seem justified in hindsight, given that—again, as Ferguson acknowledges—without Britain's intervention France would have fallen in 1914, and that even with the British aiding Russia in the most strenuous military exertion in their history, Germany managed in 1916–1917 to defeat Russia decisively and to impose a draconian peace on it.

At several points Ferguson strongly suggests that Britain's decision to intervene wasn't merely misguided but, in fact, irrational and somewhat sinister. He claims that since Britain's most formidable imperial rivals were France and Russia (rather than Germany), Lon-

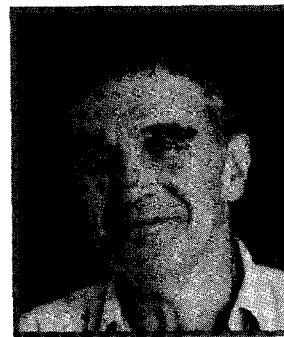
don sought the “appeasement” (Ferguson's mischievous use of a loaded term) of those powers. The resulting ententes with the French and the Russians took on a life of their own. He thus argues that the British “were exaggerating—if not fabricating—a [German] threat in order to justify the military commitment to France they favoured. . . . Precisely *because* they wished to align Britain with France and Russia, it was necessary to impute grandiose plans for European domination to the Germans.” But although it's true that the entente with Paris was reached to settle the powers' imperial



DAZZLED-SHIPS IN DRYDOCK AT LIVERPOOL.
EDWARD WADSWORTH, 1919

of three new great powers to embark on expansionist policies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the obvious difference for British calculations was that the other two—Japan and the United States—were a safe distance away. In this regard, the real “historic disaster” that turned the war of 1914 into a world war wasn't British intervention, as Ferguson claims, but Germany's war plans, which were plainly to crush France. Had the Germans in 1914, rather than invading Belgium and attempting to annihilate France, simply defended their impregnable frontier with France while moving east against Russia, they

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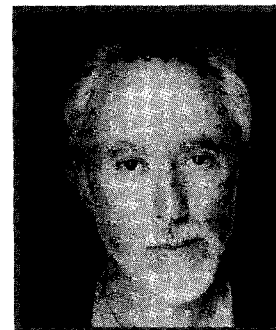
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Box words AZURE and AVIAN suggest the letter J (blue jay); FRAME and HOUSE suggest A (A-frame house); LIGHT and SPEED suggest C (symbol for light speed); SAMMY and DANNY suggest K (surname Kaye). JACK is in the box.

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differences, it was within a year transformed and deepened, thanks to Germany's antagonistic behavior, into a defensive partnership based on shared fear of German ambitions. As for the entente with Russia, contrary to Ferguson's assertion, London's anxiety to help restore Russia as a counterweight to Germany and to form a "triple entente" with Paris and St. Petersburg to contain Berlin clearly played a central role in its creation. The First Sea Lord, Sir John Fisher, perfectly encapsulated British priorities when he maintained that Germany was a far greater danger to the British than their traditional imperial rival, Russia, because the former "threatens not an outlying possession but our vitals." Since Ferguson takes for granted that without British military intervention on the Continent, Germany would have beaten France and Russia, his argument rests on his conviction that the peace Germany would have imposed on Europe was one with which "Britain, with her maritime empire intact, could . . . have lived." To support this proposition, Ferguson asserts that the Europe that would have emerged from a German victory would have been quite benign, "not wholly unlike the European Union we know today"—in which, after all, he reminds us, Germany's is the dominant economy. Having built this case, Ferguson concludes that "it would have been infinitely preferable if Germany could have achieved its hegemonic position on the continent without two world wars."

SUCH counterfactual arguments, by definition, can't be proved or refuted, but Ferguson's depend on some dubious assumptions and comparisons. The first difficulty is that Germany's aim, after the war began, to control the Belgian coast and possibly the French Channel ports as well was one that, by Ferguson's own admission, "no British government could have tolerated." Ferguson states, however, that had Britain not intervened, Germany would have honored its pledge to London—offered on the eve of war, when the British were wavering about whether to step in—to guarantee French and Belgian territorial integrity in return for Britain's neutrality.

This argument hinges on Ferguson's assertion that "it would have been fool-

ish [of Germany] to have reneged on such a bargain." But why would it have been foolish? Ferguson acknowledges that what he terms the "limited" price Germany would have exacted even under these circumstances would have included crippling the French military capacity, thus making France "economically dependent" on Germany; constructing an economic bloc in Northern and Central Europe under "Germany's economic dominance"; and effectively eliminating Russia as a counterweight to Germany. In other words, Germany, vastly stronger militarily and economically, would have been in a position at any point in the future to go back on its bargain, especially because the injured party—Britain—would no longer have allies to help it put muscle behind its protestations. Since Britain's inaction would have allowed Germany to strengthen its capabilities enormously, London would have taken a gigantic gamble based on nothing more substantial than German good will. In short, even had the European settlement that Germany would have imposed been one that (to use Ferguson's judgments) Britain could have "lived" with, the British would henceforth have been powerless to prevent it from being transformed into one that could not be "tolerated."

Furthermore, Ferguson exaggerates the power Britain gained from its empire. He breezily suggests that German hegemony on the Continent wouldn't have mattered to Britain, given its "overseas power," but he fails to define the extent of that power and what, precisely, it afforded Britain. And even if Britain did benefit from its imperial position, after the gains from the empire were balanced against the costs of sustaining it, the British almost certainly benefited more from economic relations with the Continent. This was particularly true for Britain's dynamic financial and commercial sectors, the central elements of its economic power. These relations would obviously have been jeopardized by German domination of Europe, especially since one of Germany's primary motives for establishing a Continental preponderance was to challenge Britain economically. Moreover, even those British statesmen who were most devoted to the empire, such as the ultra-imperialists Sir Alfred Milner and Leo Amery, argued

vigorously that German hegemony had to be prevented, since, they held, once dominant on the Continent, Germany would resume its fleet expansion with greater devotion and resources than before, shattering British naval mastery, the sine qua non of Britain's imperial system.

Finally, in arguing that no vital British interests were at stake in preventing German hegemony on the Continent in 1914, since, after all, German hegemony doesn't menace Britain now, Ferguson fundamentally misunderstands which power is actually preponderant in Europe today. Although Germany's is the strongest European economy, the United States is indisputably Europe's military and political leader—and in crucial ways it has sheared Germany of military and political power. By providing for Germany's security and by enmeshing its military and foreign policies in a U.S.-dominated alliance, the United States contained its erstwhile enemy, thus enabling the Western Europeans to cooperate politically and economically. Whether German hegemony in Europe would in fact have been inimical to Britain (or any more inimical than U.S. hegemony) may be an open question, but Ferguson is wrong to equate the position of a Germany victorious in the Great War with that of Germany today.

IN many ways, then, Ferguson's is a weak argument. Although he is a talented writer and a versatile scholar, he nevertheless constructs his case not from evidence but from the wish that Britain had stayed out of the colossal slaughter of the Great War and so averted that conflict's consequences—from the Russian civil war, which may have claimed nearly as many lives as the Great War that spawned it, to the regimes of Hitler and Stalin, to the reduction of Britain and even Europe to minor forces in world affairs—none of which British statesmen could have foreseen in 1914. If only "a minority of generals, diplomats and politicians" had not misapprehended German intentions and British interests, this "disaster" would have been avoided. Ferguson's impassioned and distorted argument, born of his great sense of regret over Britain's agony, is vivid testimony to the persistence of the pain of the Great War among the British people. In this way his book, while often

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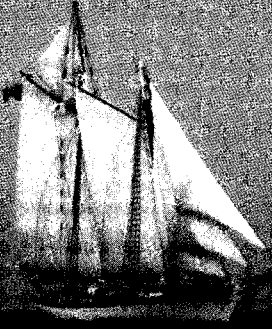
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unconvincing, is an important cultural document. But in making so stark a case with so simple a solution, Ferguson misses the tough and painful questions his subject raises. Even though much of his argument is highly disputable, his “fundamental question”—Was it worth it?—resonates. To Ferguson, the answer is blessedly simple—Since there was really nothing at stake, of course not. But this position (similar to that of such figures as Bertrand Russell, Ramsay MacDonald, and John Morley, who in 1914 opposed Britain’s entry into the war) really evades rather than confronts the question.

There was in fact a great deal at stake for Britain in the Great War. Even assuming a benevolent German order on the Continent, the result of Germany’s victory would have been that British independence as a great power would have been greatly diminished. This may seem like an abstraction. But those British generals, diplomats, and politicians who soberly committed their country to war in 1914 were hardly brimming with optimism—as Sir Edward Grey’s oft-quoted lament, delivered on the eve of war, attests: “The lamps are going out all over

Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime.” They knew, however, that few responsible statesmen would voluntarily place their country at the will of another in a world in which Thucydides’ hard law, “The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must,” has always obtained.

But to say that Britain fought the war so as not to be dependent on the sufferance of Germany doesn’t settle matters, because the price Britain was compelled to pay to preserve its national independence was truly awful. Whether that price was too high is a question more complex and therefore more compelling than Ferguson allows, and it has haunted the British mind for the past eighty years. But the question of whether submission might be preferable to waging war simply did not occur to the men who ruled Britain (or France or Germany or Russia) in 1914. As the cliché goes, the Great War ushered in the modern world. And in the world that began with four years of slaughter on the Western Front and continued with the terror bombings of the Second World War and the prospect of nuclear oblivion, that question will never again go unasked. ☛

BRIEF REVIEWS



The Late Mr. Shakespeare

by Robert Nye.

Arcade, 416 pages, \$25.95.

The narrator of Mr. Nye’s brilliant, mischievous novel is Pickleherring, who at age thirteen was recruited into the theater by Mr. Shakespeare himself. The playwright was in need of a lad to play the little prince in *King John*. Pickleherring stayed with the company all the way to *The Tempest*. Now ancient, he is holed up in the attic of a London brothel and writing the life of his adored patron. He is a merrily promis-

cuous biographer. He includes speculations, lubricious fantasies, anecdotes, rumors, and old jokes. Variant spellings of the name Shakespeare occupy half a page. A short chapter is devoted to medical remedies only a slight cut above eye of newt and toe of frog. Pickleherring naturally knows the plays in detail (he was a great Rosalind and doubled Cordelia and the Fool). He also has a miraculous foreknowledge of poets up to Dylan Thomas and Robert Nye. There is sound scholarship behind the glitter, but Pickleherring stages an imaginative act. For God’s sake, reader, take it not for fact.

**Walt Whitman:
The Song of Himself**

by Jerome Loving.
California, 582 pages,
\$35.00.

Mr. Loving's life of Whitman, while valuable in many respects, is not a suitable introduction to the poet's work. The author assumes that his reader is thoroughly familiar with the poetry and even has one or more editions at hand, along with some contemporary works. On one occasion, "Walt enclosed a newspaper clipping containing the final lines of a poem by Longfellow, . . .²²" Note 22 informs one that the lines were from "the fourth sonnet in a group entitled 'Three Friends of Mine,'" and recommends "a recent assessment of Longfellow's reputation." The lines themselves remain a mystery. This is not the way to run even an academic railroad. Complaints aside, Mr. Loving has tracked down early journalism by Whitman, material that establishes the very young man's increasing interest in social patterns and also his understandable willingness to concoct hack fiction. He badly needed money. He needed money for most of his life. His work in Washington hospitals during the Civil War is well covered, with Whitman's own letters and articles touchingly quoted. There is detailed attention to the campaign by Whitman's admirers for recognition of his unprecedented poetry, which many readers of the time considered dirty stuff—a campaign abetted by the poet, who was not above pseudonymously reviewing his own work. Favorably, of course. For Whitman enthusiasts, Mr. Loving has provided a fine, thoroughly interesting, worthwhile biography with much new material. The book does call for some preparatory reading by the uninitiated.

**Water: Worlds Between
Heaven & Earth**

photographs by Art Wolfe, text by
Michelle A. Gilders and Claus Biegert.
Stewart, Tabori & Chang,
192 pages, \$50.00.

The text tells all anyone needs (possibly wants) to know about water. Mr. Wolfe's expert photographs show water beautifully in action, and deservedly occupy most of the book.

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Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") Can Israel survive without it?

There is incessant agitation for Israel to turn over most or perhaps even all of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") to the PLO. Such a move would inevitably lead to the creation of a Palestinian State—perhaps even with Jerusalem as its capital. Can Israel survive this dismemberment? Is it in the best interests of the United States?

What are the facts?

The Root of the conflict. The conflict between Israel and the Arabs is not about borders and not about the Palestinians. It is about Israel's very existence. The PLO still adheres to its infamous "phased plan." It calls for first creating a Palestinian state on any territory vacated by Israel and then using that state to foment a final allied Arab assault against the truncated Jewish state.

The Importance of territory. Many believe that in this age of missiles, territory is of little importance. But this is not the case. The Arab states have acquired over \$50

billion of the most advanced armaments since the end of the Gulf War. And those are not just "conventional" weapons—enormous quantities of tanks,

aircraft and much more. The Arab state possess large arsenals of chemical and biological weapons, and all of them work feverishly on the development of their nuclear potential. All of those weapons have only one single target and one single purpose: the destruction of the state of Israel. And that goal is not being cancelled for any agreements between Israel and the Palestinians.

For both "conventional" war and for war of mass destruction, territory and topography are critical for self-defense and deterrence. The mountainous territory of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") is an indispensable line of defense. It totally controls access to Israel's

heartland from the east. Israel needs this high ground for defense and to be able to peer deeply into enemy territory. The high ground allows Israel to detect missiles while they are still in the launch stage and to destroy them.

Would the "West Bank" be demilitarized? Even those who want Israel to retreat to her pre-1967 borders are agreed that the evacuated areas must be demilitarized. But that would be useless. Because the Palestinians will have thousands of trained soldiers, camouflaged as their police force. In case of war against Israel, these troops could be helicoptered in minutes to their positions, with armored

"Without Judea/Samaria (the 'West Bank') Israel would be totally indefensible; therefore, neither the purposes of Israel nor those of the United States are served by Israel's relinquishing control of the 'West Bank'."

forces reaching them within the same night. In any case, it is highly doubtful that the surrounding hostile Arab nations would allow such a military vacuum

to exist. And finally, there is the matter of terrorism. There are over fifteen Palestinian terror organizations that neither Yassir Arafat nor any other Palestinian authority can control. There would be a constant rain of Katyusha rockets launched into the Tel Aviv area and into the entire coastal plain, which contains 80% of Israel's population and of its industrial and military potential. Ben Gurion airport, every incoming and outgoing flight, would be subject to mortar fire or shoulder-held Stinger attack. Does anybody doubt that the Arabs would not exploit that irresistible opportunity?

Without the "West Bank" Israel would be totally indefensible. That is the professional opinion of over 100 U.S. generals and admirals. Israel's strong defensive posture makes it most inadvisable for Israel's enemies to attack her. But once this defensive strength is removed, a coordinated war against Israel can only be a matter of time. The example and fate of Czechoslovakia, which preparatory to the Second World War was dismantled and shorn of its defensive capacity, insistently come to mind. What does all this mean to the United States? In a part of the world in which our country has the most far-reaching geopolitical stakes, Israel is the guarantor of American interests in the area. With Israel in a position of weakness, the role of the United States in the area would collapse and radical states such as Syria, Iraq and Iran would dominate. That is why, despite the heady prospect of "peace in our time," neither the purposes of Israel nor those of the United States would be served by Israel's relinquishing control over the "West Bank."

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The Deposition of Father McGreevy

by Brian O'Doherty.
Turtle Point/Helen Marx,
404 pages, \$25.00.

The demise of a tiny Irish farming village around 1940 is the subject of Mr. O'Doherty's novel. Many small Irish villages, and small islands, have been abandoned in recent times, but this one died in strange circumstances. A hard winter killed the women, and a second hard winter left the men accused of bestiality and murder. Father McGreevy's account of the tragedy suggests only partial understanding of what went on, for the good priest is unfamiliar with old superstitions and thinks well of almost everybody except his witch-like housekeeper. Mr. O'Doherty's eloquent prose conjures up snow and cold and isolation as clearly as it does small-town spite and gossip. His sketches of clerical protocol and politics are slyly irreverent. His description of a ward in a mental hospital is bone-chilling, and he gives the villagers' hats "the shape of old potatoes." Christianity and paganism are interwoven to form a tapestry of regret for both the good and the bad of a lost history. It is a morbid tale, but holds one's interest.

The Sound of Sleat

by Jon Schueler,
edited by Magda Salvesen and
Diane Cousineau.
Picador, 359 pages, \$30.00.

The painter Jon Schueler (1916–1992) spent roughly twenty years composing this extraordinary medley of reminiscence, confession, aesthetic theorizing, and journal keeping. It begins—assuming Schueler's dating is trustworthy—in January of 1957, in New York, with a personal assessment: "I am a bad father, a bad stepfather, a bad husband, an indifferent friend, a confused and disloyal lover. Only one thing: I am a good painter." Before the year was out, Schueler was installed in a village on the west coast of Scotland, overlooking the Sound of Sleat, and enthralled by the light, the color, and the constantly active skies of the north. He was not a formally realistic painter of landscape (or anything else). His object was to create psychological or spiritual meaning out of light

and color, while retaining a shadowy base in the real world. He was not at the time financially successful. The sale of four paintings in 1958—four out of a half year's energetic work—brought him less than \$2,000. Schueler's letters to dealers and agents give a poignant picture of what an artist endures and how hard he works for the little he gets. Schueler was esteemed by a few admirers, but had nothing like the status of, for instance, Mark Rothko. He had come to painting by a roundabout route, which he gradually explained in the long writing of his idiosyncratic book. The text has no orderly chronology. It is well along before Schueler gets to his war service as a B-17 navigator. He reported the tension, the action, the constant fear, and his eventual survivor's guilt extremely well—he had, after all, intended in his college days to become a writer. He wrote when he was not painting. The text leaps back and forth in time; it hops from dull details about studio furnishings to aesthetic and philosophical observations; it jumps confusingly from former wives to current mistresses and back again. It is an amazing, totally peculiar piece of work. It may be the best thing ever written about the workings of a painter's mind and eye.

The Genius of Gilbert Stuart

by Dorinda Evans.
Princeton, 196 pages, \$39.50.

Ms. Evans follows Stuart's career, commenting simply and sensibly on possible influences and the development of his increasingly subtle technique. He had no interest in doing anything but portraits, and the number of those he did is formidable. Perhaps the most notable point about Stuart is his ambition, in which he succeeded, to convey the sitter's blood and breath and spiritual animation through the motionless surface of paint and canvas. He once claimed to "copy the works of God." He certainly painted living people. The majority of the illustrations are in black and white. The color plates exasperatingly reveal how inadequately black and white represents Stuart's work.

—Phoebe-Lou Adams



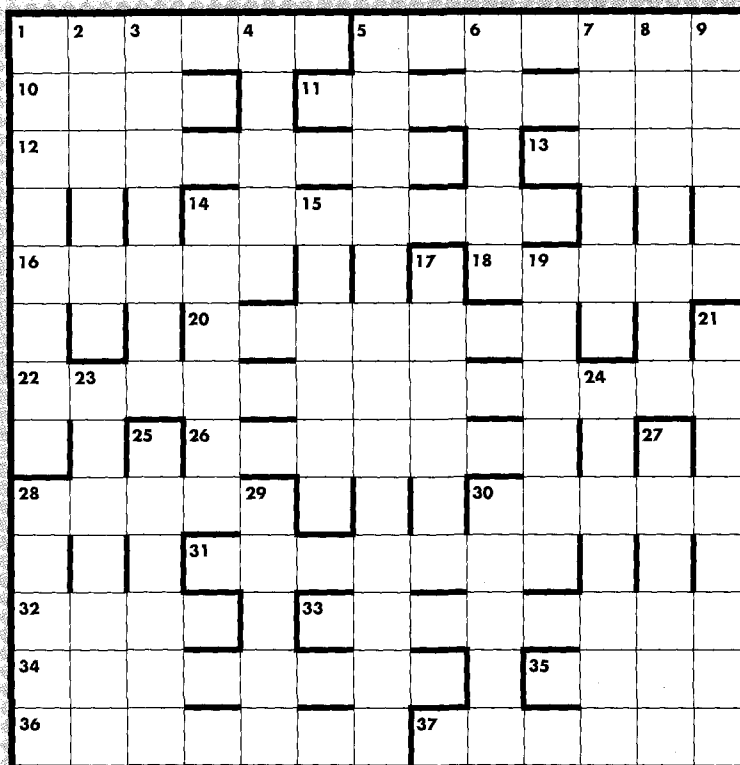
THE PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

Lawbreakers

Half the clues (20) in this puzzle break a kind of law, committing what you might call 22 Across. The punishment is 5 Down, and it's applied to the answers of the offending clues. Lest all this seem unduly harsh, we assure solvers that our wordplay (even when we go to the dastardly extreme of withholding answer lengths from the clues) is meant to be painless. Answers include 13 proper words.

The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 126.



Across

1. Stood with shields by front of dungeon
5. Silver rod holds cross
10. Cardinal eating large lunch at the outset gives grace
11. Committee's leader with church flier
12. Memorable barber and landlord? (*hyphenated*)
13. Dark brown or black, e.g., worn by private investigator
14. Minute instruments for horses
16. Big house behind a small tree
18. Hollow spot mars goggles
20. Pass through a mountain by day, getting dirty
26. Opens Chapel Hill school records
28. No-goodnik's behind gore in picture books
30. Valley contains English bush

31. Nutty and neat, like an old Italian
32. What we get from browning some liver segments
33. Leg's broken by great runner with footballs
34. Former police leader keeps shaking up or shooting up
35. Furnish anew with ruby ring
36. Ground gained, for example, by a cart in reverse
37. Team's opening cheer, rather Ohioan

Down

1. Fish in the place where you'll find nice work for yourself
2. Somewhat antiquated kind of antenna, with nothing left on it
3. Idle, I shot temple's vessel
4. Take no pitches, buster
6. Tonier horses around polo place?
7. Reveal what rascals make with paint?
8. Quality of innocence I've found in Nathaniel
9. Bugs Bunny's heart is in gangster's arms
14. Spiritualist neither great nor terrible
15. Official wizard put another coat on
17. Conservative caught in a romance nook
19. President's yo-yo is grabbed by Mafia boss
21. Sorest man beaten with bat
23. Fire yogi in Australian city
24. Crazy about railroad that is united
25. Mutt's or mouse's obedient servant?
27. Silver butt on a slate
28. Comrade of grumpy agent taking shelter
29. Fat man's somewhat unpleasant attitudes
30. Be evasive with constable's support

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.

WORD COURT

by Barbara Wallraff

Could you please explain the history of using *free* as a free-standing adjectival suffix? For example, sugar free, lead free, and smoke free seem to have entered our language within my lifetime, probably in the past two decades. When I was a child, I never heard these terms, and people said sugarless (as in gum) or unleaded (as in gasoline). The euphemistic Smoke Free seems to have replaced the simple imperative No Smoking (though chewing tobacco is still called smokeless). Likewise, fat free (which means there's absolutely no fat) is used in place of lean (meaning less fat than you're used to).

The first coinage of this type I heard of (in a magazine article, years back, recounting a courageous public protest by German wives against government orders for the deportation of their Jewish husbands, which ultimately persuaded the regime to back down) was Goebbels's "Jew free," as in "Making Berlin Jew Free" in time for Hitler's birthday in 1943. If this is indeed the etymological origin of the free suffix, shouldn't its unsavory genesis deter us from using it today in polite discourse?

William J. Kammerer
Columbus, Ohio

What do you say we blame the Nazis for the important things and leave them out of this? For one thing, *carefree*, *duty-free*, and *fancy-free* were, respectively, part of our language some 100, 200, and 300 years before Hitler was born. For another, I don't think we need look any further than our own nation's advertising and marketing departments for an explanation of the explosion of *frees*. If you

were writing an ad or deciding what to put on new packaging, which word would you choose: *free* or *no*? The fact that *free* is often seen without the hyphen that you or I might prefer is additional evidence for this origin. Contrary to nature, which abhors a vacuum, advertisers and marketers abhor a hyphen and will write *sugar free* and *sodium free* and *caffeine free* without giving it a second thought. Are they *guilt free* or *guilt-free*? You decide.

A demon that haunts me is the use of data as a singular noun. I realize this is a losing battle, but I still would like to see a few more shots fired from my side. When I first encountered this usage, it was from people I thought of as illiterates, and I was inclined to write them off. Now I see it in daily newspapers as well as in technical journals. It's wrong, wrong, wrong, and I implore you to say so in public.

Andrew T. Young
San Diego, Calif.

All right: using *data* as a singular is wrong, wrong, wrong. It's also unnecessary, because the word works fine as a plural, and because we have alternatives to it, such as the plural *statistics* and the singular *information*. But people keep getting *data* wrong because their English-speakers' ears don't necessarily hear the Latin *-a* ending as plural. Even the plurals of some words ending in *-um* that come to us from or via Latin are now typically formed in English with an *s*: *albums*, *condominiums*, *gymnasiums*, *mausoleums*, *stadiums*, and *vacuums* are examples that come to mind. And *agenda* is a onetime plural that is now almost invariably

regarded as singular, having the plural *agendas*. Be that as it may, "The *datums* are in" of course sounds much worse than "The *data* is in."

"Very few *data* are in," I have to admit, sounds hokey—less idiomatic, certainly, than "Very little *data* is in." The word is trying to sneak into the singular category by devious routes. I myself would not say either one of those sentences, but I fear that the *data* aren't all in yet on *data*.

The other day I heard my usually well-spoken son say, "The reason was because . . ." I said, "Oh, no. The reason was that . . ." Since then I have heard and seen "The reason was because . . ." in many places: on TV and even in an English mystery novel. But it does not seem correct to me, and I was happy, recently, to hear Alan Greenspan say, "The reason was that . . ."

Perhaps I am living in the past (I am ninety-three), and am not au courant with modern colloquialisms.

Margaret Weiler
Chelmsford, Mass.

The reason is *because* is a notorious little waste of words, no purpose being served by using both *reason* and *because* to explain oneself. It's not so much a colloquialism as an oversight. The *reason* people so often say this is *that* they don't think back to what they've already said. Or perhaps they say it *because* they don't think ahead.

Have you recently had a language dispute that you would like this column to resolve? Write to Word Court in care of *The Atlantic Monthly*, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, MA 02114, or send E-mail to MsGrammar@theatlantic.com. All letters become the property of Word Court.



Illustrations by Jamie Bennett

NO SILLY



HOOD

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